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LOVE FROM A CONVICT

About this Book

This is a story of first love; of a girl who, without experience, with only her instincts to guide her, gave her heart to a man who could never keep it and in doing so knew not only the pain of ultimate parting, but moments of joy and happiness that perhaps made the whole experience worth while.

Veronica Henriques in her first novel tells her story with a very moving simplicity. There is laughter in it as well as tears, and the whole freshness of youth. The result is a novel which has the ~~qualities~~ qualities of innocence and truth.

Veronica Henriques

LOVE FROM A CONVICT

London: SECKER & WARBURG

TO ST. JOHN ERVINE

“WHAT shall I do?” I cried at the beginning of life, stepping from the steps of childhood and adolescence. Leaving the home factory where I had been moulded into what I was, with my mind wound up in the fundamental facts taught at schools, my body well fed and clothed, my behaviour disciplined by the example of parents.

“What can I do?” I cried again, looking into the busy world. “How shall I fill up my years?”

“Paint,” said my mother. “I will have you taught.”

“Medicine,” said an aunt.

“Secretary,” said a friend.

“Photography,” said someone else.

“But surely I should feel something?” I said. “Surely there is something prepared. Some purpose which I must fulfil? Why must I doubt?”

“You are too young to know,” they said. “You need some experience of life.”

“But how?” I was afraid to be responsible for my actions. Frightened of the mess I might make of a life which I felt sure Fate would settle. I hovered from heel to toe. From adolescence to maturity.

“Go,” said my parents, as I hesitated. “Go,” they said finally, and pushed.

I fell out into a heap of possibilities. Into a world of situations vacant, all labelled for me with the word “Perhaps?”

Something elastic I wanted ; something that gave me

time to think, to speculate, to watch, and to move.

I decided.

I left early one morning, my clothes clean, my hair tidy, my mind eager. The train was fast and arrived at the station punctually. I hypnotised myself into wanting to do the job I was going to do. I had no doubt that my application would be successful.

I gave up my train ticket. Every little action was enormous with significance; what was daily routine for millions was a final and decisive move for me. Traffic was for me a sign of fulfilment. Every car that moved was driven by someone who had some destination to drive to; every bus that was filled was filled with people who knew where they were going; every bicycle was ridden by someone who risked the terrors of bigger vehicles because they were getting somewhere that was worth getting to; every pedestrian was pre-occupied with purpose—even shoppers bought goods for a specific occasion—and every dog belonged somewhere.

I walked along a street counting doors. 49, 47, 45, 43, six more only I thought. 31. I turned from the pavement and walked slowly up five steps in between black newly painted railings. The door was big and black. There was a brass knocker, but the door was ajar. There was a large white nipple-like bell, protruding from a dark circle. "Push" it invited. So I pushed, and then, without waiting for a reply, I walked in.

"Yes?" said a young man appearing from an office on my left, his arm full of papers.

"I've an appointment."

"Wait here, will you?" I sat down on a leather topped bench. It was a big office with a counter, behind which women were talking and drinking tea. Occasionally,

between a steady murmur of conversation, there was a brief burst of typewriting. There was more talk than anything else. Talk mixed though with the activity of hands shuffling papers, opening and closing drawers, and of fingers dialling telephone numbers. I was glad not to be noticed. I played with a magazine. Not able to read it because I had suddenly become nervous, and I was wondering what would happen next, what I would have to do and what I would have to say.

"This way."

I followed a pair of brown shoes up three flights of stairs.

"That door," said the same young man who had met me first.

"Thank you," I said and smiled, but he had turned and was running downstairs fast, two steps at a time.

I knocked hard on the door, my middle finger bent in half giving two sharp pops which echoed round the passage, sounding to me like the bang of giant cannons.

"Come in."

I went into a square room which had one wall shelved and full of books, another covered with photographs and charts, and the third was all window. I shook hands with a small man over the top of a broad desk. Then I sat down.

"Why?" he asked.

"I want to be a journalist," I said.

"Experience?"

"None."

"Qualifications?"

"None."

"Do you mind irregularity?"

"I like it."

"When can you start?"

"Tomorrow."

He got up and we shook hands. "You can go down next Monday," he said. "I will tell the editor to expect you. He will probably find somewhere for you to live. Goodbye."

I left uncertain still about what impression I had received : pleased because I was in a groove. The wheels of my future had started to roll. Nothing, nothing could stop them. They rolled freely on to Monday.

“GOODBYE,” I said to my parents, as they handed me over to myself. “Goodbye,” I said, taking possession.

“Goodbye,” they answered. “Good luck,” they said wistfully, wisely abandoning their grip, accepting my inevitable change from dependence to independence. “Come back,” they said, full of love for the being that they had between them created.

The green flag waved up and then down. The train moved. I was away, in flight, the whole world was mine; I could land where I wished.

“Goodbye,” I called finally, and watched my parents wave, and then turn, arm in arm, and walk along the platform.

Five hours later I was on another platform. The platform of a station on the South Coast, and the air smelt of sea.

“We are expecting you,” said a ginger headed man. His chin stuck out unnaturally far, so that he looked like a caricature of a man with a big chin. “Hot, isn’t it?”

We drove in a small car around the town. We drove past a clean, square, big building.

“That’s the office,” he said. “But we’ll go to your digs first. You can meet the editor and chief reporter later.”

I already felt important. I was an unknown quantity. This man had no idea what I was like, where I went to school, who my friends were, what games I played, what countries I had visited. I was thrilled with my

new sense of ownership. I decided to keep myself carefully wrapped up. I would not disclose myself more than was demanded by necessity.

"Ever worked on a newspaper?" said the man.

"Never."

"My name's Norman Donovan."

"Mine is Joan Reid," I told him.

"Good, Joan. We all call each other by our Christian names, of course."

He was friendly, and pleased with himself. From Norman I learnt about some of the other reporters. Some he liked, some were bad, some were good, some he didn't know much about. I listened but remained uninfluenced. I wanted to leave my mind blank like a page of very white paper, so that every impression I got of everybody and everything would come to me quite undiluted by other opinions.

That evening I went to the office. I was aware only of eyes. Rows of eyes watching me, glass doors and windows that allowed no privacy, and voices that spoke, but somehow got lost in the largeness of space.

"Well, you must look after yourself," said the chief reporter. "You'll be shown what to do for the first few days. Read the paper."

"Come to me if you are in trouble or want to know anything," said the editor, as I left his office, a stable closed off from the enormous room where everyone else worked.

"Half-past nine tomorrow," said someone as I walked self-consciously between long tables occupied by sub-editors who stopped scribbling to watch me, to size me up.

"The back door at night," an old man making tea said to me. "You'll soon get used to the place, Miss," he

added kindly. I walked along a 'cat-walk' above the printing works, and the printers and compositors whistled at me as my shoes set the iron platform clanging.

I arrived at my digs in time for supper. Supper was always late, because they had high tea at six. The strangeness suited my mood.

"You'll like it here," they said at my digs. "It's lovely in summer."

"I know I will," I said.

I SAT at a long brown table crowded with typewriters waiting to be told what to do. Faces glanced at me curiously. I glanced curiously back at my colleagues, wondering what they were like as they wondered what I was like. I couldn't see Norman.

I explained to the most friendly face, "I've just been taken on as a reporter."

"We heard you were coming," he said. "Your first job, isn't it?" He smiled, and I liked his face.

During that first day, when I had little to do, I decided that I would make myself important to three of the reporters. One was a large man, Philip, who talked loudly, not to anyone, but to everyone. "He will talk to me," I thought. "Soon."

The other was a strange young man called Hugh—about my own age. He drifted in to the office. He caught my eye, and I smiled. He looked away and started talking to someone else. He had a deep voice. He didn't talk to me for about three weeks. The third was the first man who had smiled at me. His name was John. He was kind-hearted, and together we had coffee, sometimes lunch, sometimes a drink.

"You're new?" the townspeople would say, knowing every strange face, and all the reporters.

"Yes," I would say, sounding shy. In this way I did quite well because people were kind. They wanted to help.

I worked and wrote. I wrote to a pattern of questions and interviews; I lived to a pattern of presenta-

tions, dinners, speeches, bazaars; I lived like a patchwork quilt moving from square to square within the limits set by the time, place, and circumstance of a provincial paper.

Wholeheartedly I lived my life, enjoying it all. I made no effort to foresee the future.

"What will you do when you leave?" Hugh said, talking to me for the first time.

"What will you?" I said.

"Be a better reporter on a better paper."

"Why haven't you spoken to me before?" I asked.

"I wouldn't have known what to say. The moment has only just come."

"Moments do come, I suppose. One can't make them?"

"No," Hugh said. "And the way we live in this work, from moment to moment, it is impossible to foresee anything. Nothing can be forced."

"It is easy to live from moment to moment. Letting one's life be organized by somebody else."

"Yes. In our case by the chief reporter."

"I wanted to speak to you the first day I was here," I said.

"Yes, but I wanted to know you better first, though." Hugh laughed. "I let someone else do the hard work of finding out about you. I let John tell me all the preliminary details about you."

"Do you pull people to bits, you and John?"

"Yes. But you are still rather a mystery."

"As a matter of fact, I am to myself," I said, realizing the truth of it as I said it.

Hugh and I would wander together down to the harbour. At night we would watch the pilchard boats come in, and stand fascinated as the fish flashed in the

lights of hurricane lamps which swung from the masts of the little craft. Cold hands worked fast, extracting the wriggling bodies from hard, wet nets. The fishermen rarely spoke. They worked in silence, so that the only noise was the splashing of water and occasional coughs. Sometimes the chug of another boat coming in or going out would make them look up for an instant. We would stand hand in hand because it was more friendly. In this way we became intimate with each other, yet knowing nothing of each other's past lives. When we talked, we talked about abstract subjects. I achieved my first object. I became important to Hugh, as he became important to me.

"I think people should be important to each other, that relationships should mean a lot, don't you?" I asked.

"They do to me," he said.

"What are you doing?" wrote my parents. And I sat for a long time wondering what I was doing. I was writing my little bits of local news, I was drifting about in my spare time with Hugh or with John. I would sail sometimes with a solicitor whom I met after I had sat near him in the Divorce Court for a week. "I am sailing," I wrote to my parents. "I go sailing with a solicitor who owns a little boat. I love it."

We had parties. I was new to parties. I was used to dances with nice local young men who would talk about other nice local people and cars and horses. I had been a nice young girl. I got used to sitting, drinking, talking, laughing, kissing colleagues if the moment came, and forgetting about it afterwards. I lived an uncomplicated life. Emotional, and yet not emotionally binding. We had to live a social life of our own because we worked at strange hours. Thus there were no social

barriers. Reporters could come from any walk of life. One judged and was judged for what one was, not from where one came.

I rolled smoothly along in my chosen groove, from funerals to weddings, from divorce court to fish market, from parish councils to Freemason dinners. There could be no better way for gaining experience.

"I am gaining experience," I wrote to my parents, who wrote back, "Good, but don't get stuck down there."

"Do you go out?" they wrote. "Are there nice young men?"

"No," I wrote back. "There are no nice young men. No, I don't go out. I drift, drift, drift."

I did, in fact, drift far farther from the life to which I had been brought up than I or my parents realized. They worried. They wanted me to meet eligible young men. "You mustn't become anti-social," they said.

"But I have," I wrote back.

I went home for Christmas that year. I hated the local parties. When my week's holiday was up, I was glad.

"Goodbye," I said, with no regrets.

"Come back," said my parents, noticing a rift.

"Yes," I said, not knowing when. I didn't want to know. I pretended not to notice the rift.

WINTER on the moors was exciting because the landscape became intense. Every line meant something. The dark contour of a hill seemed to point significantly at a valley, which would always be hidden, until the very last slope of a steep road which might slant down quickly into a valley before racing once more up to the top of the world again. The top of the world must look very like moors in winter. Bleak, bare, but full of intriguing dips and shadows.

We went out to a hunting dinner one night, miles from the office. Right out into the moor we drove. The reporter with the loud voice who talked at people—his name was Philip—and I. We went in his car. It was bitterly cold high up on the moor. The little road twisted, maddeningly, and the fog was thick. Sheep would lie in the road and refuse to move. They huddled together for warmth, and so used were they to traffic that we had to get out and shout to make them move.

Philip talked about his passion in life, the world of theatres. "That play is good," he said.

"I don't like it," I said.

"Well, you are wrong," he answered.

He was like that. He was always right. There was no doubt in his mind about that. So when he talked, he expected people to listen. He was a brilliant talker. He could tell jokes so that you had to laugh, even if you were sure that they weren't funny. Philip carried people along with him. He was very big in all ways; he talked

big, and he filled a room when he came in. It was impossible not to notice Philip in a room.

"You are sweet," Philip said to me.

"How do you know?" I asked. "You never talk to me. You talk when I'm there, and sometimes look my way, but you've never registered *me* as a person."

"Oh, yes, I have. I notice more than you think," he said.

"What do you notice?" I asked, curious to know.

"That you are small. That you have nice breasts. That you enjoy life."

"Do you think I'm a good reporter?"

"Oh, that doesn't matter. That's not the important thing about you."

"But it is to me."

"Well, it shouldn't be. Women shouldn't bother about their work too much. They are there to add a little colour to a working man's life—to be a little light relief. What they actually achieve doesn't matter. I don't care a damn what *YOU* achieve, but I like seeing you about the place."

"I can't argue with you," I said hopelessly. "But you must know I have to disagree. Otherwise my whole life is wrong."

We reported the hunting dinner and meeting. Philip went out to telephone the office halfway through, and I carried on. Then we stayed on and danced and drank and talked. It was late when we left the little hotel, buried in one of the moor's secret valleys. It was snowing, and the wind was freezing. The car skidded. When we arrived at the little prison-town on the highest point of the moors, we had to stop. It was a tiny town, everything centering around the prison, which was a large long building, with high walls covered in little holes.

which were windows to the cells. If you saw the building without knowing what it was, you would say, "That's a prison." There was a hotel converted for warders, a church where the convicts were taken to pray; a few shops which supplied the prison with its rations; a post office for the use of the warders; a pub for the warders when off duty. Occasionally in the summer trippers would stop to gaze at the prison, and perhaps buy something from the shops or have a quick drink at the pub. The town was isolated, so that it was difficult for prisoners to escape. So similar was the surrounding landscape that it was difficult for them even to get their bearings if they did escape. There were no high trees to act as landmarks, and it was far too bleak for anyone to build a house on the tops of the hills.

Here we stopped, and backed the car in between the pub and the greengrocer's shop. It was too late to wake anyone up, and it was very cold.

We got into the back of the car and settled uncomfortably, trying to sleep. Philip was big enough to curl himself around me and keep me warm. I was much more comfortable than he was, but my feet were very cold. Neither of us slept much.

"What a compromising situation," I said, when my extremities were so cold that I couldn't even doze.

"I shan't deny anything," Philip said. "Though I have to behave rather well in this confoundedly cramped and cold place."

We both laughed at the situation.

"Here I am," said Philip, "with a perfect opportunity to seduce you, and what can I do? Shiver and feel you shivering. I can't even kiss you, I'm shivering so much."

We talked intermittently for the few hours before dawn.

At five-thirty in the morning we saw lights go on in the "warders'" hotel. It was snowing. With my small pocket comb I tidied my hair.

"What an idiotic thing to do," said Philip, holding the torch for me, because it was still dark.

Together we got stiffly out of the car. Philip at once fell flat on the ground. I laughed and stepped to help him, and fell flat myself. The ground was icy. A group of ponies stood together in the middle of the little street. They looked towards us, nickering, hoping for food. Propping each other up, we cautiously walked across a square to the hostel. We went around to the back and knocked on a door.

"A man will come with keys round his waist and lock us up," Philip said. The door opened, and a fierce faced man with a bunch of keys dangling from his waist stared at us.

"Yes?"

Philip explained. They knew the newspaper, but prison regulations were strict. He hesitated, and then took pity on us. He led us along a passage to a room, quite bare except for two chairs. "You can wait here," the warder said. "One of the prisoners will be in to light the fire shortly." He jangled off, and left us.

"Johnson, light the fire in the rest room," we heard him shout.

"O.K." said a voice. For me, it was an exciting voice. The voice of a convict. I had never seen a convict at such close quarters before. This one would be fierce. Only the worst convicts came to that prison.

"Philip, quick, what will he look like?"

"Short, square, with a scar across his left cheek, of course."

"Oh. I think he will be enormous. Rather like you, but uglier, and fat."

We waited, listening. Firm footsteps came along the corridor. "Not humble enough for a convict," I thought.

He came in, a bundle of sticks under his arm. "Good morning," he said, smiling. "We don't often get visitors here." We were disarmed. I was shaken. Philip was amazed. There was a man with a fine face. It was the sort of face you feel rather than look at. The brown eyes were very deep set, and his eyebrows very straight across his brow. They looked as if they should meet above his nose, but they stopped suddenly, thickly.

His nose was fairly straight; it had a slight twist as it neared his nostrils, which sloped back gently, sensitively. His mouth was straight, the upper lip very slightly overlapping the lower. His chin was square. He was a very attractive looking man. The sort of man I would want to love.

"Are you a convict?" I asked.

"I am," he said. "Now I'll just light the fire for you." I watched him fascinated, and once he looked at me and smiled gently, and I felt the smile right through me.

We crouched round the fire when he left.

"I love that man," I said to Philip.

"Yes. He's not in the usual run of convicts. I wonder what he did. Probably attempted to kill his wife."

"Do you think he's married?" I was disappointed. "Let's ask the warder."

"He's serving his last year," the warder told us. "We aren't allowed to tell you what he's in for. They come down to the hostel to work during the day towards the end of their sentence. He's a cut above the others, of course, though we often have Lords and Dukes and

whatnot who have tried to poison wives, or who have gone mad and attacked butlers."

"He looks like a poet," I said.

"Oh, he's a nice chap. We all like him. Strange fellow. He's getting you some tea."

He came back with two mugs of tea. I wanted to talk to him. "Thank you," I said. "Have you had some?" Suddenly he laughed. "You make me feel as if I was at a tea party with a Duchess. Yes, I've had some. We get up at five."

"Awful," I said.

"You forget, I'm a convict," he said.

"Yes. I do." I wanted to ask him to come back with us.

"Come on, Johnson," the warder said.

"Goodbye," he said. I didn't answer.

I watched him go, strangely breathless.

"How like you to fall in love with the first convict you meet," said Philip, watching me.

"It's odd," I said, wondering about Johnson. "I wonder if we'll see him again, ever."

We saw him very soon. The tea finished, we slid back to the car. Philip writhed himself round and round with the handle, turning and jerking it suddenly, but the engine seemed to have withdrawn coldly, far from the duties of an engine. We tried to push it, and a warder watching from a window shouted to us.

"I'll bring some men."

Five men came, and one was Johnson. "If we push yer, we expect a lift," grunted one of the men, and he did look like a convict. Cropped hair suited his surly face.

"One, two, three . . ." said the warder. The car slid off down the street. Philip at the wheel. I stood in the

street watching. The five men pushed. The warden followed behind. It stuttered, and then with a sudden rush the engine fired and roared. Philip trod on the accelerator and went roaring off down the street.

"He'll turn in the churchyard," the warden said, coming back with the convicts.

"We all will one day," wisecracked a convict.

"Do you live near here?" Johnson asked quietly.

"Yes," I said.

"Come and see me. Visiting days Sundays, four to six."

"Yes. I will. I promise I will," I said, taking myself by surprise. Johnson was immensely important to me.

"Well, you'll be all right now," said the warden, as Philip drove up to us.

The convicts waved as we drove off. I waved to Johnson. "I'm going to see Johnson next Sunday," I told Philip.

"Really?"

We arrived back at seven. We were teased in the office.

"I hadn't a chance of seducing Joan," Philip said. "She fell in love with a convict."

Diana was interested. A competent reporter, but a lonely and rather unhappy person, she often talked to me. She confided in everybody. Everybody knew her dearest secrets, and her mismanaged love life, but I showed more interest than the others, perhaps because I was a woman, too. "His name is Johnson," I said. "I love him."

"Oh, Joan, you can't. You haven't really fallen in love with him, have you?"

"I have."

If Johnson had been anybody else, I would not have talked about it. Yet so improbable was my story that I could talk as much as I liked, knowing no one would believe me. Talking about Johnson gave me the same exhilarated feeling as a sudden strong drink can do. Had anyone known how sincere I was, I could not have talked so freely. Usually, if things matter a lot to a person, they do not talk about them. They store up the thought, emotion, or whatever it is, guarding it from others, like a dog with a bone. It becomes something very precious. Johnson was precious to me, but no one knew or even suspected it.

"I am in love," I wrote to my parents.

"Who? Do bring him home," they wrote.

"I can't," I answered. "He's still in prison."

I floated around with my pencil and notebook. I wrote good, inspired stories. The editor congratulated me on a story which I wrote about a man who fell overboard whilst fishing and was drowned. He was still holding on to a bag of bananas when they fished him out. He wasn't quite dead then. I callously dramatised his tragedy, delighted to have been the reporter to get the story. He had been given the bag of bananas by his wife, and was passing them round to his mates as they waited for the nets to tense before hauling them in. As he leaned forward to the first mate, he was for an instant off his balance. Suddenly the net jerked and he toppled over the side, hitting his head as he fell. The story got into the national papers. I was paid lineage by these papers. With the money I bought a large cake for Johnson, and some cigarettes.

"But I don't know if he smokes or not," I said to Hugh.

"Are you really going to see him?" said Hugh, amazed.

"Of course. What books shall I take?"

Together we went to Mr. Thomas's bookshop. It was down by the fishmarket, in a little turning off the pavement. A mermaid swung gaily outside the shop, happy on her signboard, and behind her was the sea. Mr. Thomas smiled at us. His white hair was striking because he was not an old man. His glasses added a friendly roundness to his already round face. He had known Hugh for years, and because I was a friend of Hugh's, Mr. Thomas took me under his wing too. At any time of the day I could pop into his shop and be sure of a cup of tea. I would see a book I liked. "How much?" I would ask. "Ten shillings," he would say. I would look disappointed. "Three and six to you," he would say. "Must treat the Press well." Often on Sundays, Hugh and I would go to tea with Mr. Thomas in his flat, high above the harbour, with a lovely view of the sea. His wife was pleasant, smiling, and intelligent. She had a funny clipped manner of speaking. They had a daughter of thirteen, but she was shy and never said much.

"Are you coming to tea on Sunday?" Mr. Thomas asked us.

"I can't," I said. "I'm going to see a convict, and visiting hours are from four to six. As a matter of fact I've just come to buy a book for him."

"Is this girl speaking the truth?" Mr. Thomas asked Hugh.

"Seems to be," said Hugh. "She's quite mad, and swears she's in love with a convict who lit a fire for her and Philip at five-thirty one morning."

"You have been reading too many books," said Mr.



Thomas. "You need tea." He dived behind a pile of prints and maps, and we heard noises of cups, and of water going into the kettle.

"What do you think, Hugh? D. H. Lawrence? You'd say Sartre, of course. Something that will cheer him up when he's locked into his cell?" Books were everywhere and we gazed in indecision, all three of us wanting to solve satisfactorily the problem of a reading convict.

"Crime and Punishment," suggested Hugh, waving the book at me.

"Is he an educated convict?" said Mr. Thomas.

"Yes. He looks like a poet," answered Hugh. "Doesn't he?" But I couldn't joke about Johnson. Johnson! What Christian name would go with Johnson? I hoped it might be Richard.

Sitting, surrounded by books, with Mr. Thomas and Hugh, I was immensely happy.

"He can't be unfaithful anyway," I said aloud, quite seriously as the thought crossed my mind.

The other two laughed loudly. "Hugh will have to report this wedding. It will be a good story," said Mr. Thomas.

"If you live a life of making things that happen to other people sound strange and newsworthy, then I'm sure something strange and newsworthy is bound to happen to you," I replied.

"I think you do love your convict." Mr. Thomas gazed at me.

"I do."

"I shouldn't," said Hugh.

"Are you coming to tea, Hugh, on Sunday?"

"Yes. Unless you'd like me to come with you, Joan."

“Will you? I would like it, even though you are only inquisitive.”

“Well, you only want company there and back.”

“Come and see me soon, children,” said Mr. Thomas as we left.

I HAD to ask specially for Sunday off. I should have been working.

"Going away, Missy?" said the chief reporter.

"Just for the afternoon," I said.

Hugh came up to my digs. I heard the bell ring and I jumped up with sudden surprise, although I had been expecting him. The moment is nearly here, I thought.

"Come in, Hugh," I heard my landlady call. Used already to the reporters who were my friends, she often offered them food. She liked to have her house full of young people.

I stared at myself in the mirror. I brushed and brushed at my hair. I smiled at myself. I frowned. I studied my face, wondering which of my expressions Johnson would like most. Then I laughed. How would I look through bars?

"Hugh," I shouted. "What will I look like through bars?"

"Hurry, Joan, or you'll miss the bus." Sudden fear of missing the bus made me rush around collecting all the things I meant to take. The cigarettes and books I put into a straw shopping bag, gay with red and green—it was a bag my parents had brought me from Spain. The cake was in the larder. I almost fell down the stairs. "Here," I said, giving Hugh the basket as he stood in the hall. I went to the larder, and straight to the place where I had left the cake. It had been cut.

"Mrs. Drew!" I called to my landlady. "Is this my cake?"

"Yes, dear. We had it for supper last night. It was sweet of you to bring it. Do you want to take what's left to eat on the way?"

I cursed my unconscious generosity. There was enough for three slices, anyway, so I put it into a bag.

"Come on," said Hugh.

"Goodbye, Mrs. Drew," we called.

"I'm not going to carry that ridiculous bag for you," Hugh said.

"It's not heavy. I thought it would add colour to a prison cell."

"You don't go into the cell," Hugh said.

"I've never visited a prisoner before."

It was early afternoon, and already the light was dulling. The bus took us seven miles along a flat bit of road. A golf course lay alongside the road for a bit, and many men strode purposefully about dragging their golf clubs behind on mobile caddies.

"Like a lot of old women shopping," I said, watching one man sending his ball whizzing up into the air in a wonderful circle, so that it disappeared and we couldn't see it land.

"They should let the prisoners play golf," I said.

"With the warders as caddies?"

The bus dropped us at the junction of five roads. There a few shops had opened up, and several people who didn't like living in the town had come to live. From this little place the train across the moors to the prison went three times a week. On a Sunday it was quite full. People went to see their relatives, but few people visited the prison because the prisoners were not local. Perhaps a parent or a wife would come down once a year to see their convicted relation. Some could never afford to come.

I was sure Johnson's parents could afford to come. My heart was thumping with expectation. I was afraid that the sleepless night and the early hour might have distorted my sight and thoughts; that perhaps Johnson would look horrid, and speak gruffly, sourly to me.

"He *must* be pleased to see me," I said.

The little train scurried round the hills, weaving through the valleys beside little streams. That day it was rather like a ghost train plunging through the supernatural. The mist lolled lightly between the hills, neither high up on top nor low in the valleys. Horses and cattle grazed at certain spots, barely distinguishable from the thick little bushes which covered the ground, and the bark of a sheepdog seemed unnatural because we could see no farms from the train.

We could easily have been dead, I thought. Dead except for the human emotions with which we seethed. Johnson would expect me, because I had said I would come. I saw myself entering some room with a warder at the door. Johnson would come up to me smiling, and say 'How very nice to see you,' and he would be delighted with the books and cigarettes, and laugh when I told him about the cake. 'I would ask you to my cell if I could,' he would say, and I would find out about his family, and tell him that I knew he wasn't a dangerous convict, really. We would get on well, and when he came out of prison I would meet him . . .

"Nearly there," said Hugh, as we felt the train slow down for the last uphill effort before we arrived. The air looked cold, and as we opened the compartment door and stepped onto the pavement, the wind caught the tops of our necks unawares and whipped round them, choking us with cold.

"We must be mad," Hugh said. "What a place to

come to on a Sunday. Did you know what you were doing?"

"No," I said, avoiding purposefully any self-analysis, and trying not to search for reasons of like and dislike, desire and aversion. I fought against the need for reason.

"We are born to do things that are already planned for us to do. We needn't, we shouldn't think about our actions."

Millions of eyes were meeting, conveying thoughts of millions of people. Why should one pair of eyes have more significance than another? Why should one person be singled out to attract another person? Why wouldn't anyone do? Coincidence for me was a futile word. It referred to the past, it hinted at condition. If, if, if. The constant harking back to the past that this word inevitably meant was a waste of the present, which was precious, so instantaneous was its effect. Impulse was to me fate's way of rationing my future, of giving me some feeling of control over my life, so that I could develop a personality, become an individual.

My throat and neck were cold, and the wind blew my hair back and took my breath away.

"The train leaves at 8.30. Don't be late, unless you want a night in gaol." Red-nosed, but warmly coated and capped, the porter punched our tickets. He wore mittens and the ends of his fingers were red. Stepping through the station barrier, we found ourselves at the lower end of the one main street, which ran uphill towards the prison, stiffly enclosed on either side by the shops, houses and offices that were the ingredients of the place.

There was a lack of colour that day, and the grey-white sky reflected its dreariness on the buildings and the street, and even on the people who walked up and

down it. No one sauntered in Finston. They went out to get some definite thing or to walk briskly across the moor or to catch a train or to go to church.

Hugh and I sauntered because we had a lot of time to waste.

"Will you see Johnson now or later?" Hugh asked.

I would be allowed to talk to him for fifteen minutes. I felt reluctant to start those minutes off. If only I could have broken them up into three lots of five. Then each time I could experience the anticipation which was now weakening me in a strange sort of way. The moments preceding an event are so often more pungent than the event itself. Fear of anticipated pain is worse than pain itself. Pleasure before a meeting is so often more gratifying than the meeting itself. Instinctively I was afraid of spoiling my satisfying image of the visit.

"Now," I said, forcing myself to a decision.

"Shall I come with you?" Hugh asked.

"Do you want to?" It had not occurred to me that Hugh might want to come.

"Yes, I do."

"Well I'll go first, and you join us for the last ten minutes," I said.

"All right." Hugh looked at me, wondering. "Why do you want to see him alone first?"

"Because I love him," I said. "Don't you like to have people you love to yourself?"

"Of course, but your love seems to be slightly unorthodox. What a strange person you are!"

Was I strange? I saw the same things that other people saw when I looked around. I said the same sort of things that everyone else said at certain times. Looking at a view that was beautiful, I would say "How beautiful," knowing that because the hills rolled in a

certain way, and the sky was a certain colour, and the trees lined up along far stretching fields at a certain angle, cuddling a little village in a certain position, the effect was one of acknowledged beauty, and in acknowledging beauty, one should say "How beautiful."

"It's not strange to love, Hugh," I said. "Everyone loves. Just because I love a convict it makes me no stranger than someone who loves a liftdriver, or a hairdresser."

"It's not so much who you love as how you love," Hugh replied. "How do you know you are in love? You say you have never loved before, so you have no emotion with which to compare your present feelings. Yet as soon as you look at someone, after a cold sleepless night, and receive the sensation of swallowing a plum stone, you gaily tell yourself and everyone else that you're in love."

"But I had no thought of love," I protested. "It is because I was suddenly hit by the thought and feeling of love—long before I had time to tell myself I might love and what it would be like if I did love this man—that I know I love him. When I saw him, the 'moment,' that very 'moment' which we have talked about before, arrived. At once I knew. If I didn't love him, would I *know* so surely?"

"I should have thought your emotions are so unstable that you will never know anything lasting about them. One moment you will be violently in love, and the next you will be bored stiff."

"Oh, well." I abandoned the struggle of introspection. We passed a bakery which included in its business a small restaurant.

"Let's have a cup of tea first," I said, still stalling.

We looked at our reflected selves in the window

before going in. Hugh put an arm round my shoulder, so that we looked as if we were posing for a seaside photographer.

"How flung together we look," I observed, then we pushed open the swing door and went in to the pleasing warmth of the shop, and were soothed by the delicious smell of newly baked bread.

"What a strange time to bake bread!" Hugh said to a fat little woman who stood behind a counter loaded with loaves and rather dull-looking cakes.

"We do it for the prison on Sundays," she said. "They come in about tea time for it."

We sat down in a corner at a little round table. Unbuttoning our coats we felt a bit like sunbathers exposing themselves suddenly to caressing heat. We smiled at each other in the dim light, quite at ease. "Black or white?" I asked.

"Milk and sugar."

"You want some light," said the little woman, switching on a flickering bar of fluorescence. "Just had it fitted," she said proudly.

"Just what we don't want," I said, and it suddenly looked like night outside. It was in fact about five o'clock.

Our hands supported our heads, and we talked, sipping, for some time.

"We must go." I suddenly felt the urgency of seeing Johnson.

We arrived at the prison running, with the books, cake and cigarettes thumping up and down inside my Spanish shopping basket.

"No cameras, files, or knives," said the warder at the gate.

I opened the basket to show him.

"All right. First turn on the left, but sign in first."

"Joan Reid," I wrote, and the date. It all looked significant and important to me, once it was down in the heavy leatherbound book.

"Now you, Hugh," I said.

"I won't come," said Hugh. "Not this time. Is there anywhere I can wait?"

"Yes, sir. There's a waiting room."

Round to the left we went, along a wide paved path, spiked railings on one side and tall blank wall on the other. As we went into a squarely arched door, we were again stopped by an official.

"Johnson. I've come to visit a convict called Johnson."

"Yes. You did tell us. No. 6983. You, too, sir"

"No," said Hugh. "I'd like to wait."

"Right. In there, sir, please. Come this way." Alone, I followed the warder down long, straight, bare corridors, sometimes up steps. I didn't know where we went, but I felt my inside trembling, and I held tightly to my basket.

"Here we are. Now, if you wait in here, I'll bring Johnson. You know the procedure?"

"No."

"Well, you'll have two warders standing by the door, and you must sit on the far side of that big table. Johnson will sit here on this side. You must keep your hands on the table and any gifts you have to give him must be given through one of the warders."

"I see," I said.

I sat at the end of the large oblong table, a blank wall behind me and a wall blank except for a window high up near the ceiling on my right. Johnson would be sitting with his back to a blank wall, too, about four feet

away from me, at the table's other end. The warders would stand by the door on my left. The room was the same shape as the table. I sat waiting.

Heavy boots magnified the sound of footsteps, and I heard a warder say "This must be a red letter day for you, 69."

Then the door opened, and Johnson was there. Standing still, in his grey uniform, he looked at me for a minute.

"Sit down," said a warder. "You have fifteen minutes." Johnson moved to his chair opposite me and sat down. The warders stood inside the door, which they closed.

"Been quiet today," one said to the other, watching us, but seeming casual, putting me at once at my ease.

"Good evening," I said to Johnson.

"I didn't think you would come," he replied, his hands on the table. "I have never been visited before."

"That's why the warders said a red letter day?"

"I think perhaps they'd seen you."

"Oh. What is your name? Your full name?" I asked.

"Richard Anthony Johnson, convict 6983. What is yours?"

"Joan Reid. A bit dull, I think. I wasn't sure I would come either."

"Tell me," he said, "what you were doing that morning early?"

I told him, watching him, gazing at his features, letting my eyes stroll over his face and head, and I longed to stretch out my hand to touch his hand. As I talked, he smiled.

"If we could stretch our arms out we could touch each other's hands," he said. "For the first time since I've been in prison I really want to get out."

"How long have you been here?"

"Three years. I've behaved well, so I'm being let out early."

"When?" I asked.

"In about six months. Why did you come?"

"I don't know. Curiosity, I suppose. I have never been to a prison before."

"Do you know why I'm here?"

"No."

"Do you want to?"

"Sometime."

"Which means," he said, "that you will come to see me again. I should hate you just to dissolve into that filthy mist which surrounds this place for twenty-three hours of each day and night, after encouraging me to look forward to your visit, and more visits."

"I'll come again. But, of course, I work most Sundays."

"How old are you?" he asked, and I could see he wanted to know about me, so that he could think about this meeting long after I had gone.

"Nineteen."

I had no wish to know such details about him. I wanted to find out about him slowly. So that getting to know him would be almost like squeezing him out of a tube, with something new to discover at each squeeze.

"I was thinking of you as some toothpaste," I said. "I shall squeeze you slowly out of a tube until I get to know all about you."

He laughed loudly, deeply, his voice echoing around the room, and his mouth went into a wide, wide smile.

"You didn't say anything particularly funny," he said to me, "but it's wonderful to feel like laughing, and that's what you have made me feel."

"I've brought you some books and some cigarettes and a slice of cake," I said. "Do you smoke?"

"No. But give them to me. I can be generous to my warders who are nice to me."

"What do you do all day?" I asked.

"Work outside a lot. Digging, building, farming a bit in a collective way. You must see parties of us marching along the road sometimes?"

"What did you do?"

"I'm not going to tell you. I may tell you next time."

"A colleague of mine wants to meet you."

"I should like to meet him," Johnson said, and I was disappointed, because I liked being alone with him. "Or her, is it?" he asked.

"Him. Is that disappointing?"

"Of course." He smiled.

"Why don't you look gaunt and guilty?" I said.

"Now ask me why I speak with an Oxford accent. Ask me questions. Go on, question me, question me endlessly. Why can't anyone take a person for what he is and not what he has been?" He talked quite quietly, but very angrily.

"Don't get cross," I said. I hated people to be cross in any way with me. "It withers me to silence. I wouldn't be here if I didn't like you as you are."

"You like me?"

"Yes."

Sadness shadowed Johnson's face. "I would like you always to like me, because when I first saw you sitting cold and uncomfortable in that rest room with your friend I longed to offer you something. Some sort of warmth, some sort of hospitality, and so I enjoyed lighting the fire for you, I enjoyed getting your tea, and I enjoyed pushing the car. If I wasn't in prison I

wouldn't say this to you. I would be able to convey it in some other way. But fifteen minutes is a short time, and all I can do is sit. I must say things that would normally be left unsaid. Normally I would get your address and take you out again and again. I *know* it would be again and again. Do you?" He looked at me and I heard the warders shuffle. I looked up at them, and one pointed to his watch indicating that time was up.

"Do you?" Johnson insisted.

"Yes," I said.

"It's you who have to come and see me," he said, rising.

"I will," I said. "Don't forget your things."

A warder stepped across for the books and the cigarettes and the piece of cake.

"What a nice basket," Johnson said. "It's not English?"

"Spanish," I said.

"Goodbye, Joan," he said, his eyes smiling quite happily. "Fifteen minutes isn't long." He stood up and went out with the warders. One of them said, "Wait here a minute, Miss, and I'll show you the way out."

"Goodbye, Johnson," I said.

"You can call me Richard," he called along the corridor.

"Fast work," a warder said to him. I still sat with my hands in front of me on the table.

“SILENCE,” I said. “Silence wasted time.” I regretted the fifteen minutes now gone. “We sat,” I told Hugh, “and talked slowly, tentatively, in between long silences.”

So much could have been said. Far too much had been hidden as we felt around for weaknesses in each other. The whole visit was blurred for me, seeming a waste, a horrid waste, and misery engulfed me, convincing me of my failure to justify the occasion. All could have been said.

“Why do we have to disguise ourselves? Why can't we open up and admit the truth. And when it is a fine, satisfying truth, why more than ever do we hide it with inhibitions?”

“But did you?” Hugh asked. “So often, looking back immediately, you see everything in distortion. Wait till later and think again. How could you know?”

How could I know? What was I? As I had plunged away from my home, life beginning, I had known that emotions were more engulfing than events.

“It doesn't matter. It can't matter that much. I can go back.”

Back up those steps, repeating the time. The same footsteps would sound too loud again, and again there would be nothing but a length of table and Johnson's hands, long so that they didn't seem large, and Johnson's eyes. I should talk, hardly meaning what I said; talk only just expressing by tone rather than words the longing I would experience; the longing to be close to

the man in silence. But silence was no good to us, it wasted our time.

"We haven't time to waste," said Hugh. "Drink up." I held the glass mug up to the light, so that the bubbles fizzing in the cider twinkled.

"If you're catching that train, you'd better be quick," the pub keeper said.

"How much?" Hugh asked, and paid.

"I've got two slices of cake still," I said, holding Hugh's hand, letting him pull me along as he ran.

"Come on, come on," said the porter. "Thought I told you not to be late."

In perspective the interview seemed marvellous. I found I was left with an intoxicating aftertaste. I was hilarious for days.

"Come down, come down to our level," said Philip in the office one day, as I came in laughing after a tea with some old age pensioners.

"The Lord Mayor made some wonderful jokes," I said. I read them out.

"My dear, I've heard them all before. One last night at the railway workers' dinner, one at the junior chamber of commerce luncheon and the other ages ago, when he was laying a foundation stone."

"It doesn't stop them being good, and old age pensioners like to hear things that happened in the past." I was in no mood to be silenced or sobered.

"Come and have some tea," someone said. Only a few reporters were in the office.

"Yes," said Philip, shouting round the room, so that everyone looked at him. "Who's coming out for tea?" He reached for an extraordinary felt hat which, perched on his huge head, looked like some peculiar animal. In

a few enormous strides he stood by the door, holding it open.

"Come on, come on," he commanded. Almost unwillingly, three of us left the table and, putting on our coats, went out of the door which Philip held open for us.

"We really must have a party," Philip told the world as we went down the wide steps and out into the street. He waved his arms in a gesture of control, and as if we were mobile toys, we toddled along in front of him to the cafe nearby where we always went for tea. It was easy going anywhere with Philip, for it was just a matter of surrendering oneself to a strong will and then not bothering. "Tea for four," said Philip. "Toast and cakes."

"Not for me," I said. "I've just had tea with the old age pensioners. I'll just talk to you."

"You can drink a cup. For four," said Philip to the hovering waitress.

"If I wasn't feeling exceedingly mellow you would infuriate me," I said to Philip, though I enjoyed being bossed by him, as did everyone else.

"Why?" said Philip, quite unaware of his authority.

"Because you treat us all like your subordinates," I said.

"Well, it's you who notice it, not I," said Philip.

I was off duty that evening. I would write some letters in my room.

I wrote to Richard. "How are you?" I wrote. "I am tea-party-ing and funeralising. I have to come to a funeral in your town, Finston, next week. I wonder if I'll see you working? I can't come to see you for another week, but I still remember with pleasure the last, and first, visit. I hope you do, too."

I wrote to my parents. "I am happy. I am in love with a lot of people."

It was true. I seemed to have an enormous capacity for loving. I loved Hugh. I loved Philip, and I loved John. For me they were all people who could accept my affection without any demands and whose affection I could receive equally with no demands. They probably loved other girls far more satisfyingly, and, in any case, I loved Richard.

Together we lived in an atmosphere of "good stories." Every morning we read the newspapers. Newspapers were filled with foreign affairs; we were swept into a feeling of internationalism; and we longed for a world government. Some mornings we would sit, waiting for calls which would send us off with our notebooks to a corner of the town, or even county, dismissing the present and full of ideas for our futures.

"How small we seem," we would say. "How big the world is, and how exciting the power of the Press is."

Even on a provincial paper, the power of the Press is felt, and for young reporters with ambition the possibilities of getting thoughts printed and shown to the public seemed always imminent.

"We want to write," we would say, and our minds would be filled with swimming thoughts, which plunged about chaotically, disorganized and unsorted. "What is important?" we would ask, and at one moment we would agree that the single life was of importance, the life of any individual, great or anonymous. At another moment we would be immersed by the size of the world and the size of its population, and think only of people as a huge mass. Easily swayed by journalists and writers who wrote as we would like to write, our moods alternated between fantastic ambition for everybody, and

resignation to our own lot. Always, though, we talked as if we were apart from everybody, like actors or gypsies, as in a way we were, flitting from one sort of society to another, from social class to social class, from sport to thought, from life to death.

As we moved from dreamlike talk around a coffee table we would change moods like a chameleon changing colours, and become suddenly involved in the occasion or person which we happened to be reporting. The more experienced reporters did not become so involved as the novice like myself.

"Miss Reid," said the chief reporter. "Are you busy?" I was sitting lazily, with my feet up on the bars of another chair, my left elbow resting on the table, talking about silly things, distracting other people who, used to constant disturbance, clicked away on the typewriters, ignoring me.

"No." I had to say.

"A man died yesterday. Well known in the town. Go and get something about him."

Coat, handbag, new pencil and notebook. The door swung behind me, and I ran for a bus. Energy seemed to pop inside me. I had to run.

The street was shabby, and as I neared the door I thought about the sadness of death. I pretended that someone I loved was dead or dying; Richard is dying, I told myself. I felt the empty chasm that seemed to increase as I thought of all the hopes, all the wonderings and all the doubts which Richard had caused within me. How desolate I should be to know, know absolutely, that it was useless for me to think any more of Richard. My extreme energy sobered down inside me and became heavy with sadness. So, slowly, I walked along the little street with little houses along it all alike; only a coloured

door or a suddenly neat garden expressed individual character. The house to which I was going had a very neat garden and a dark red door. On the door shone a brass knocker. I knocked.

"Come in." A small man opened the door. "From the Press?"

"Yes."

"Come into the back parlour, will you. The coffin's in the front."

I walked through the house along a narrow corridor into a room at the back. People stood about talking quite happily.

"Lady from the Press," announced the little man.

"Good morning," I said, noting nothing, just feeling the people. They felt like a family, friendly and a whole.

How old? What did he do? Spare time spent? Lived where? Children? Grandchildren? Public life? Private life? Likes and dislikes? Questions which would provide the details necessary for a paragraph. From the answers I could sum the man up. Fantastic to sum a man up like that, and yet it could be done. So would I be summed up. So would we all, and sometimes a character can seep through those answers and suddenly one sees a person, the ghost of a person, standing before one like a man on trial saying, "I demand to be. Though I am dead, these answers make me alive to you and that cannot be denied." So they live, even if only because a child will one day say "Grandpa sat with a book on his head when he read, so my father did, and so will I, too."

"Have a drink?" said a daughter of the deceased.

"Well, thank you," I said, still looking sad.

We all drank port and talked about the weather. "Not too good for football with the ground so hard," said a son.

"He loved football," said the widow in a matter-of-fact manner. "Went up every Saturday they played Home."

I wrote it down. It was pretty ordinary though. Most people, most men, did go to football in their local town every Saturday they played Home.

"Care to see the flowers?" asked the son who had greeted me at the door.

"They're lovely," said the widow.

"Thank you very much," I said.

We went along the corridor again, this time to the front parlour. The son opened the door and stood back. Colour, living colour filled the room, black curtains covered most of the window, and the light was artificial. The flowers were beautiful.

"How lovely," I said, looking around. As I gazed, my eyes slowly noticed the coffin amidst the spray of colour; gradually they followed the line of the coffin; along the bottom, morbidly curious up the sides. With a start, I saw the top was off, and, involuntarily, as I saw a white, still face, I gasped and stepped back, bumping the son as I did so. It was my first glimpse of a dead person. My breath left me for a minute.

"Yes, there he is," said the son.

I was weak suddenly. The dead man seemed far away as I wrote him down in pencil, and suddenly, in contrast to the glorious life of the flowers, so horrifyingly close.

"Thank you," I said. "Lovely." I left without looking back, the image of the man in my mind. I must have caught the right bus, I must have walked into the office quite sanely. Yet all I knew was that the face was there in front of me, and all down one cheek and along the bony ridge of the white nose was written the man's age.

his likes and dislikes, his children, and the local team kicked a football along his pale still mouth.

"Hullo there," said Philip.

"I've seen someone who is dead," I said.

"Is this the first time?" said Hugh. "Haven't you seen them at the mortuary?"

"Got the obituary, Miss Reid?" said the chief reporter.

"Hurry," said a sub-editor. "We can get it into the next edition. We've got a photo."

I spilt out the details, in duplicate; with my hands trembling I inserted the shroud-like bit of carbon in between two flimsy sheets of copy paper, and I battered away at the old typewriter as quickly as I could. I wanted to finish the matter, to lose contact.

"Never seen you hurry before," remarked Diana. "What's bitten you?"

"Hullo, hullo," said the sub-editor as I handed him my copy, "What's the matter with you?"

"I've just seen this man's corpse," I said.

"Oh, is that all? Thought something might have gone wrong at the prison." He pencilled the copy hurriedly and popped it, rolled up, into a tube which took it whizzing along a wire through the ceiling to the printing works. Gone was my corpse, in a tube or a coffin, it didn't matter. I should not see it again.

A voice scooped at some long neglected sense buried inside me, making me swell with feeling, and join silently in the melody as it alternated between soft sadness and high exalted wonder.

"That," said Philip, "is singing." Doesn't it uplift you?"

"Yes," I replied, resenting his interruption. "Let's listen."

When the record was finished, Philip turned off the gramophone. Philip, who paid little attention to me, had suddenly rung up. "Can I come with some records?" he had asked, assuming my yes, because he then said: "I have bought some wine and some cheese. I will be there soon."

He had taken possession of my room. Filling it with his bulk, he had walked straight in. His bottle had been banged down on my table, then the cheese. "Sit down," he said to me, so that I became the guest and Philip the host. "Now, listen to this," he had continued, and led me aurally up to the modern opera which I disliked.

"Next we'll have something quite different," he said, sorting among the enormous pile of records with which he had suddenly appeared at the door of my room. "This will do you good."

So we listened to modern opera, but I was untrained, I felt lost, far behind the music of a modern mind.

"I don't understand. Go back, back to the music I can follow, back to the moods of song in which we have been revelling," I said.

"You should understand," said Philip. "This is your time."

"I'm slow. I'm lost. Go back. My grandchildren will listen to this. I want to hear the songs which my grandparents listened to."

"You should try. You sit lazily, saying go back. Now, keep quiet and listen," Philip ordered.

So I sat, almost understanding the violence of the music, but regretting it, finding it disturbing, feeling uncomfortable.

"I enjoyed playing those to you," Philip said.

"But you didn't notice me."

"Of course I did. I could have played them at home

if I had wanted to. I wanted to play them to you." Philip uncorked his wine, and demanded some glasses. "And a knife for the cheese," he shouted to me, as I went down to the kitchen.

"I liked hearing them," I said. "I like to be shown good things. I can never find them for myself."

"It comes with time, with age," he remarked. "Drink." We drank. Philip put an impersonal arm around me.

"You are odd," I said. Philip was strange and inexplicable. Never before had I met a person who floated above everyone as he did, and yet who, in certain contrast, so relied on people. Philip had to have an audience. That was why he had come up to my room with his records. Even when he was listening to music, he needed an audience.

"You will never marry, Philip," I said, "because no wife will be content just to listen to you, and be swamped by you."

"Do I swamp people?" he asked, quite unaware of his own personality.

"Are you unscrupulous?" I asked.

"No. Not as far as women are concerned, anyway. I would never seduce a woman, though I'd let myself be seduced by a woman."

Time sped on, things that were coming came, and were gone.

I saw Richard again.

It was when I went to the funeral about which I had written to him.

The oldest man in Finston had died.

"You are an expert on funerals, Miss Reid," said the chief reporter. "There's a good one for you out at Fin-

ston. You can spend the day there—wear black and don't forget to claim 1s 6d for its wear and tear."

I found someone with a car, who had the day off. "Take me," I suggested.

"All right," he said, bored and enjoying the drive out across the moors—expenses would be paid by the paper. "I've got some friends beyond Finston. I'll pick you up later."

I went into the little house where the old man had died. He had been a widower. In this house there was no sadness.

"How old?"

"He was 91."

I talked to a daughter, prepared to ask the routine questions. First I said, because she wasn't sad, "No one seems upset. Was he ill?"

"No," she said, white haired with a pleasant generous face, "he was never ill. He said on the Tuesday, 'Tomorrow I am going to die. I want to be buried in a week's time—the bearers will be (and she listed six names). I want the bearers to be asked back to tea. I want you to all go to church and sing this hymn (he named a hymn). Sing loudly' he said, 'because I shall be there in spirit.' The next day," the daughter continued, "he died. Today, as he asked, we are having his funeral. We are having the bearers back to tea. And now I must go, or I will miss the service. Do come back to tea."

I went to the service. Everyone in Finston who wasn't working was at the funeral, and they sang loudly. The address by the preacher for the town's oldest inhabitant was brief. The dead man had been a milkman. As we came out of the little church we found a bride, in white, waiting to come in with her bridegroom. Some of the

funeral guests were going to the wedding. I talked to the vicar.

"It is strange, isn't it," I said, "that he should have known so certainly that he was going to die? That he should have made all the arrangements?"

"On, no," the vicar replied. "They often do that in Finston."

I went back to tea, and the atmosphere was happy. Somehow, way out and on top of the moors, living in one of the most desolate spots in England, people knew how to die. Death was no more final than birth, than marriage. We are all born, we all die. It is part of an eternal circle.

The wintry sun shone for the bride, as she and her groom posed for photographs outside the little church. A group of convicts passing, with pitchforks and spades over their shoulders, stopped for a moment to watch. The warder behind them smoked a pipe.

"Hello, Joan," said Richard.

"Richard!" I said, still mixed up in marriage and death. He stood by the side of a rough looking man, wearing a dirty coat of some nondescript material, watching me. He had a pitchfork over his shoulder. Probably he had been forking manure at a nearby farm. "A nice wedding," I said to him, watching the sun glint on the pitchfork, with nothing else to say.

"Come on," said the warder, and they marched off. Richard smiled back at me.

"One gets used to them," said one of the guests of both funeral and wedding. "We almost get to like them."

Together we watched the line of convicts, as they walked, two together, up the street, not quite march-

ing, and the smoke from the warder's pipe followed along behind.

"We get to know them quite well," he continued.

"Do you know one called Richard Johnson?" I asked.

"Oh, not by name. We just get used to the same faces. Some stay ten years or more. Do you know Richard Johnson?"

"Yes."

"Friend?"

"Not really. I came across him," I said.

"In your work, I suppose? You reporters get to some queer places. Not the sort of job for many girls?"

"No." I watched the convicts turn in at the prison gates, trying unsuccessfully to see which was Richard, but he had become an anonymous blur.

"Hello," shouted the reporter. "Finished?"

"Yes. Coming," I shouted. And we drove back with the sun setting, but both refreshed. He, by his day off and visit to friends, I by seeing Richard and by the old man's wonderful death. I told the reporter about the funeral.

"Jolly good story," he said, dropping me at the office.

"Good story," said the news editor. "We'll have to keep you on funerals."

"But it can't happen twice. I'll turn into a corpse soon," I said. I felt that I was a competent funeral reporter. I wanted something else.

"I saw Richard," I said to Hugh. "He looked splendid with a pitchfork over his shoulder."

"So do I," said Hugh. "He's rather an unsatisfactory sort of person to be in love with, isn't he?"

"No," I said, wondering if I would be off again on Sunday. "Will you come to see him with me on Sunday?"

"No," said Hugh, bored with Richard.

"I went to a wonderful funeral," I wrote to my parents, "and saw Richard Johnson, the man I love. He had been working with a party of convicts. All the others looked dull. He didn't. You would like him."

"Darling," my mother wrote back, "Don't lose your sense of proportion altogether. I hope you are teasing us?"

Proportion whirled so that one minute Richard was huge in my mind, an enormous figure who walked beside me during the day, and the next minute was nothing but a tiny far away figment of a dream. "Richard!" I cried, alone, watching the sea, "I do love you." I held a note from him, which I had just received, a few conventional restrained words.

"Love me, love me, love me," I pleaded, seeing Richard himself as I gazed at his handwriting, disappointed by the briefness of his note. "Time pass," I begged, "so that I can be with Richard."

"Life," said Philip, "is not as easy as that. You can't just fall in love."

"I can," I said, a feeling of love absorbing me so that I wanted to kiss everyone, to love everyone, to lose myself in a bog of emotion because I was being worn to bits by my frustrated passion. "I want to sacrifice myself!" I cried to the sea, "O what can I do, how can I hope?" and the sea cried back, reflecting me cruelly, "You don't love. You want to love. Relax, child, relax."

"Am I child?" I said.

"A child, nothing more than a child," the waves repeated again and again, derisively splashing me with salt spray.

"Speed on Time," I pleaded, and time sped on so that in six weeks' time Richard would be released.

Sundays came. I saw Richard and loved him. Never memorising his features, but always lost by the sensation of being near to him, I longed for the day when I could touch him.

We both longed to be close.

"You'll be disappointed," warned Philip.

"Just a convict. Romantic only in chains," said Hugh.

"Come down to earth, Joan," said Diana.

"I hope it'll be all right," said John.

"Don't do anything foolish," wrote my parents, as I soared high up above their talk, winging about in thought, barely noticing what I was doing, meeting only birds in clouds, finding only smiles in the streets and laughter at sea and singing in the fields and feeling on delirious space; space which mumbled and murmured incoherently about things that were good, fine, splendid; I soared searching interminably for superlatives in a superlative life; looking at my watch to see the date; stooping to tie up shoe laces when I meant to put on my hat; brushing my hair when I meant to make my bed—vague madness propelled me insensibly around so that the world cried with Diana "Come down to earth!" But I refused to listen. Who would come to earth when the air in heaven was whistling with gaiety and promise? Who could do anything so sober as come, go, sit, walk, write, talk, when words and actions meant nothing, and feelings were far beyond the range of any vocabulary. Love was not a long enough word to describe my mood; I searched for something long, tall and wide; I looked up, higher and higher, wider and wider, I searched for words, for thoughts, but nothing would suit me. I could not be suited. "I'm living," I cried. "You poor, poor things who only exist," and again I gazed at

my watch as it ticked; no more weeks I saw, only days, only hours, only minutes.

"Come down," cried Diana.

"Only seconds!" I cried back, exulting.

"Joan!" called Philip, harshly, brutally breaking into my world. "You've seen the paper?"

"Paper?" I said. "I don't read papers."

"It's Johnson," he said.

"Richard Johnson! My Johnson? What?" I said, knowing suddenly that of course it was about Richard.

"Everything is about Johnson. About Richard Johnson," I said. "And tomorrow, tomorrow we will hear more of him, more and more so that we will be glutted, but gloriously glutted with news of Johnson."

"Joan!" Philip yelled. "Come here, you little fool."

"Look," Philip said, holding the extra final of the evening paper in front of me, and pointing with an enormous finger at a half-column item. "Look."

And his finger was the symbol of disillusion, waving triumphantly at disappointing news, watching gleefully the fall of my elation.

CONVICT ATTACKS WARDER in strong black letters; underneath in the usual print were the details. I hardly had to read them to know that it must be Richard.

"One day before he was due to be released a 32-year-old convict attacked a warder who was bringing him some civilian clothes. It is believed that the attack was with bare fists only, but that the warder fell back against a cell wall and hit his head. He is now in hospital suffering from concussion and head wounds. His condition was stated at lunch time to be satisfactory. The convict is Richard Johnson, who was

serving a five-year sentence, which was reduced for good behaviour. There will be an inquiry at the prison later this week. The convict has been removed to a punishment cell. In a statement made later an official of the prison said that Johnson had always been exceptionally well-behaved and he had made several arrangements for his future and had been talking contentedly about his release tomorrow which has now automatically been cancelled."

Cancelled. I was winded and dazed, incapable of any movement at all after reading the death sentence to my jubilant hopes. I stood paralysed, not wanting to cry or to laugh, with nothing to say, but just suffocated by an immense cloud of misery and seeing before me a desolate stretch of waste, which I could not bear to look at. I turned to Philip.

"Please do something," I said, genuinely unable to think of what to do myself with myself, yet knowing that I must do something.

Then my mind went into a complete blankness, so that I had no idea of what Philip had done. I found myself lying on my bed, dressed, but covered by a blanket. Philip was in the room playing some records.

"Is it true?" I asked. "Richard Johnson attacked a warder? Or have I been dreaming?"

"It's true. I have to go now. I've got a job, so what will you do?"

"I can't lie here," I said hopelessly, trying to think of something to do. "I had better come to the office and do some work."

"I had no idea," Philip said, "how much it mattered to you. I thought this love of yours was invented. I am really amazed."

"That's all it was," I said. "Invention."

Wondering, inventing a person, I became that person. Detached, self contained, I made myself charming. For only by acting in this way could I bear the disappointment. I liked everybody equally. I thought I acted well.

"For goodness' sake, Joan," said Hugh. "Stop acting like a wronged woman. You are behaving ridiculously. Everyone notices it."

I wrote to Richard, telling him that I was disappointed. I was not allowed to see him. I heard no word for two weeks.

Then I had a long letter from him.

'Joan, dearest, I stopped being a human and became an enclosed corpse incapable of writing, and whilst delighted with your letter, sad that you are sad, and dreadfully sorry that I have made you so miserable, I couldn't write until now. Now I can't write what I really feel and you will understand why. We, for our sins, are not free to write what we feel, and if we were wise we would try not to feel.

'We knew each other quickly and loved each other quickly. Yet how do we know how right our feelings are? Perhaps it is a good thing that we have never met on equal footing—I mean as two free people. After all, for three years I haven't talked to a woman. Perhaps it is only because you were the first woman of my kind that I have seen that I think I love you. This sounds hard, but it is important to be hard. Don't let's allow any doubt to make us unhappy or any false notions of romance to keep us clinging to each other. I am not the sort of man for you to cling to, or for anybody to cling to. As you may have gathered, I am vicious tempered, and my vicious temper is too

dangerous to be allowed loose. So it is imprisoned and I am imprisoned with it.

'I want you to know that your visits, your letters, and even I'm sure your thoughts have made me immensely happy. As happy as I can be, and I was longing to be with you and to know you. I can only blame myself that I did not see you and do not know you. The four walls around me are too blank, and next Sunday will be the same as countless Sundays before you came, and yet I can't reproach myself or fill myself with regrets for what I did, because somehow it was inevitable.

'Now forget me, or rather remember me as an incident; let the incident lie among your experiences, which will teach you that it is far better to get into a rut of society and stick in it; that it is all wrong to allow yourself to love anyone outside that rut, and should you happen to do so, control that emotion at once or expect disillusionment. I can't say more on the subject. I think, you see, that I love you, so that no matter what I find out about you by talking to you, I shall still love you. But I hope that I am wrong. And more than ever I hope that you are wrong. I am too selfish to say 'go,' though I am trying hard to make myself. But it would never be wise to love me, and I am sure you should break away quickly. I am not allowed visitors for a month or two. Fate (do you believe in it, too?) has prevented our meeting. Perhaps it will cause us to meet as old, old people. Let's leave everything in its hands, but don't let's be passive. You must try hard to treat me as an accessory to your life, one that will add to your happiness, not detract from it. I think, perhaps, I am a bad person,

but I am far too bad to be a spoke in the wheels of your fortune.

‘How lyrical all this sounds! Thoughts tend to be lyrical if left to themselves—which mine are. Our post comes soon, and a warder will be collecting this. I don’t know how to end. Let the end be abrupt; as abrupt as the whole affair.

Richard Johnson’

SPRING ended and we were restless. With a year of work almost completed, we waited for our fortnight's holiday.

"What will you do?" I asked people, wondering myself what to do.

"I think I will go to Paris," said Diana. "I've never been to France, and I don't want to die before I do. Do you think it matters going alone?"

"I should hate it," I said. "But you might know someone there?"

"Yes. I do. Have you ever been there?"

I didn't want to talk to Diana about Paris. I thought Paris would be wasted on her because she was so practical. Straightforward 'Northern' blood flowing through her veins made her so, or so she told us. I thought a person should be either very smart or else a dreamy intellectual to appreciate Paris, and I slightly resented Diana going there.

"London for me," said Philip, already booking tickets for the theatre, already striding about telling us what he thought the plays would be like.

"You're so critical," I said, "you can't ever enjoy a play completely."

"Ah. That's just where you're wrong, my dear Joan. I can appreciate a person walking across the stage to shut a door because I know exactly how difficult that is to do, but you probably wouldn't notice it."

I had stopped arguing with Philip long ago. He always sounded right.

"I haven't decided," said Hugh, who had already missed half of his first week by forgetting to go.

"I'll go home I expect," said John.

"What will you do?" they said.

"I don't know," I said. "I should like to go abroad." I longed for my holiday, but I didn't want to leave Richard. I hadn't seen him since he had attacked the warder and I had hardly written to him. I just sent him a cake every fortnight and included sometimes a brief note. I would make it impersonal, hoping that he was well and telling him that I was. He never answered or thanked me—but I still sent the cakes.

"I thought of hitching to Italy this year. Will you come?" wrote my friend, Helen.

"Yes," I said, and with the next cake I sent a note to Richard. "I am going to Italy with a friend," I wrote. "I may send a postcard."

He answered. "Happy Holiday. I shall miss my cake, but long for the postcard. R. Johnson."

Anticipation was pleasant, and I was happy with my holiday ahead. Before I had finished anticipating I was packing a few clothes into a rucksack. I packed it full, so that every little pocket bulged, and when I thought it was full and saw a pocket which did not quite bulge I found something else to put in.

When I first shrugged the rucksack onto my shoulders, it felt light.

"It feels light," I said. "I could take more."

We crossed to Dieppe and got a lift to Paris. It was then midsummer and in Paris it was hot.

"I know someone," I said, as we were in Paris. We looked up the address in the telephone directory and walked to the place. Our rucksacks were light no longer, nor were our tempers good.

"He is away in the country," we were told. We asked where the nearest station was, and finding out roughly the right direction we staggered along there. Our sore shoulders were continually rubbed sorer by the straps of the rucksack, and our hips, too, ached from the frame which was essential to a big man with a heavy load marching for miles. "We should not have used commando rucksacks," Helen said.

At the station we saw a train standing by a platform, the only train there at that time. We were tired, and careless of our original ambition to get to Italy.

"We'll get on," we decided, "and see where we get to."

"Perhaps it will be Nice," suggested my friend. She was fair and had freckles.

"Perhaps Brussels," I said, hoping it might be. We sorted out our money.

"We mustn't go too far if we want to spend any money on food and living and wine," said Helen.

"My roving spirit is subdued," I said, leaning on my rucksack and rubbing my shoulders.

Soon we were on our way to the coast of Brittany.

"Richard will be amused," I said.

"Why? Who is he?"

"He's a convict," I said. "I told him I was going to Italy, and this is somewhat off course."

The train rushed madly along, stopping suddenly at tiny stations before scurrying off again. The country was lovely in summer, sunburnt and bright. We both went to sleep for an hour, dozing off uncomfortably on wooden seats, with smuts covering our hair and our faces and our clothes so that we looked dirty, and felt dirty, and were in fact filthy.

Afternoon to evening, evening to night, and harbour

lights blinked with a French accent along the coast to warn us of our arrival at our station. "I'm sure it is a predestined destination," I said to Helen. "Something wonderful will happen, or at any rate something which will be significant in our lives from now on."

"Nonsense," said Helen.

I was sure that something would happen, and I was excited.

Dark streets did not welcome us, and we tramped up them, knocking on doors, asking for beds. The one hotel in the little resort, which was frequented mainly by French holidaymakers, was too expensive for us. Finally we were offered two camp beds in a linen cupboard by a kindly but rough Frenchwoman who felt sorry for the two 'jeunes anglaises.' Her house was attractive, with one corner which became a tower, bulging roundly, and containing a spiral staircase. Up this staircase we spiralled wearily, bumping our rucksacks each time we turned. There was only a skylight in our linen cupboard, but at least there was no heat turned on. We slept well, not missing space, because just for sleeping we needed none.

We breakfasted at a pension a little further along the same street, and from it we saw the sea. Sea is always exciting; the first sight at the beginning of a holiday seems to stir up some long-sleeping energy, which fired my arms and legs with the desire to move rapidly. So although we had crossed the Channel only the day before, this first sight of particularly French sea stirred me up and I wanted to go and bathe quickly. As we sat at a table, the only English people in the little pension, sipping our coffee, eating croissons and swilling our mouths out once more with coffee, I imagined the first chill of the sea, the sudden dive I would take, gasping

and then the wonderful free feeling of wriggling all limbs in all directions, and the delicious sensation of dipping my head in the water so that the cold salty water stroked my hair as I swam on my side or on my back.

"If you can imagine something so clearly, why bother to swim?" said Helen.

"I wonder. Before you eat something, you often know just what it's going to taste like—yet you still eat it—and not necessarily because you are hungry—it's very odd," I said. I tried imagining that I had swum.

"I have been swimming," I said. "There is no need to do it again." But the desire was still there.

We arranged to move to the pension from our linen cupboard. We could see the little house with its turret from our new bedroom window.

The sun was hot when we moved across.

"Now we can swim," I said, and together we changed into bathing costumes and ran down to the sea. There was a small beach, but the rocks were smooth and it was far nicer bathing off rocks. From these we could dive, and they were warm to lie on.

The sea seemed warm at first, but cold patches lay about like traps, and we were always caught in them. When we swam far out we avoided these cold patches, and tossed on the large waves like lumps of wood. Exhausted we climbed back to the rock, collapsing, offering ourselves as toast to the sun.

"I've found two mermaids," said a voice, "lying on the rocks." We were annoyed to hear an English voice.

"Bonjour," said the voice again, and a tall man stood on a rock above us staring.

"Bonjour," we said in our best French.

"You're not French?" asked the tall man.

"Pretend to be," Helen said.

"My name is Tim Morlock; this is David Cadgson, a friend of mine."

We introduced ourselves, our bodies warming in the sun, sizing up the two men, one tall with hair like a haystack falling at the most convenient angle over an already angular face, and the other, David, of medium height, square and slightly plump, with soft dark hair and dark brown eyes. They both wore flannel trousers and light coloured shirts. The sea lapped against the rock below us as we sat, Helen and I, our arms folded around our bent knees looking up at the two men.

"We'll swim with you," said Tim.

"What are you?" I asked, wanting to know without the bother of any preliminary chat. Preliminary chat was superfluous on such an occasion when we wanted to know about each other without it much mattering if we did or did not like each other.

"Well, I'm writing a thesis on French telephone lines, and David has come with me."

Looking at Tim I thought that he looked a bit like a telegraph pole. I laughed.

"Why?" he asked, wondering why it was funny that he should be writing a thesis on telegraph lines. "As a matter of fact, I couldn't think of anything else to write a thesis on."

"I was only laughing because you look a bit like a telegraph pole," I explained. "You were destined to write a thesis on telegraph lines." I noticed Tim had very blue eyes and thin lips that never seemed to stay shut. While they stood by us, he produced a pipe, and started to play with it.

"Like a baby and a rattle," I thought.

"Come on," said Helen, and once more we dived into the sea, our warm bodies stiffened for an instant as we first hit the cold water, but almost immediately relaxing again, moulded by the motion of the salt water through which we were slowly swimming.

"Nice people," Helen said to me, as we swam lazily off the rocks, heading out of the little bay.

"Yes. Of course, isolated people so often seem nice."

Two quick splashes, and the sound of slapped water made us turn round to see Tim and David crawling out towards us, puffing out water like whales, and kicking up a trail of salt spray.

"Hello," they said reaching us—"this is fine."

"Are you going to look for underwater cables?" I asked turning on my back, letting my head be half buried by water, shutting my eyes against the sun's rays.

"No. This is just a holiday," said Tim. "What are you?"

"Two girls on holiday." I said, bored with what I was, in terms of words, just wanting to be, without any reason for being. "Worshipping the sun," I added.

"I'm a medical student," said Helen, answering David. "At Queen's, in Belfast."

"That's funny," said David. "My brother was there

"Coincidence has become a misused word," said Tim.

"It's more of a coincidence now if you meet someone who doesn't know anyone, any place, or anything that you know than if they do."

"True," I said. "Who do you know?"

"Oh, I don't count," said Tim. "I'm a recluse."

So we met and at once abandoned ourselves to each other's company, almost immediately liking each other, none of us wanting more than a temporary friendship.

"One always meets someone on holidays," I had so

often heard people say, and had always been repelled by the idea.

"But who wants to meet someone on holiday?" I would wonder, thinking of boarding houses and Brighton.

Tim and David got a room at the pension, and within a few days Helen and I were almost unwillingly intrigued by the French telephonic system. We gazed in awe at crooked telegraph poles planted in a meandering line across the country, going, not as the crow flies, but as the spirit moves a lazy Frenchman. We took little notebooks and filled them with numbers, creeping round posts to find little metal tabs indented with figures; we made telephone calls from boxes hidden round obscure corners in villages, arranging, perhaps, to telephone Tim three miles away at such a time as four minutes to five in the evening, and taking a telephonic journey of twenty miles to do so; we posed so that Tim could take photographs with some human interest, "to make the layman interested as well as technologists."

We spent many evenings tracing complicated charts and drinking vin ordinaire.

One day Tim granted us a day of rest.

"I've finished with this area, and you'll be going soon."

I bought a postcard to send to Richard, but Richard seemed far away. Work seemed far away, and soaked in sun my memory had melted so that I was only conscious of a day as it came.

"Here's a good card," said Tim, as I dithered, twiddling a card rack round and round. "Who's it for?"

"It's for someone I know in prison," I said. "I don't know whether it's mean or not to send a beautiful

seascape, or even beautiful girls sunbathing?"

"If I was in prison I'd like something bright and very far from prison life."

So I bought a card shiny with blue brightness and red rocks.

"Not Italy, but Italy couldn't be nicer. Love Joan." I wrote, and nothing more.

I posted it, and Tim and I climbed up a hill towards a Basilica where we had arranged to meet Helen and David.

"I know a prisoner, or rather a convict," said Tim.

"Do you?" I said, disinterested.

"A cousin of mine," Tim went on, his mind wandering back, recollecting, but I stopped it.

"Don't waste time remembering, Tim," I said. "Notice today whilst it's here," and today seemed vital, and something had clicked in my mind, some strange bit of thought had snapped, so that I was just aware of it, but not able to comprehend what it was.

The Basilica was huge and simple, with stone pillars smooth and unpretentious reaching up to support a softly arched doorway. We walked up the steps slowly and quietly, pushing open the huge wooden doors so that they creaked pleasantly. Inside we joined Helen and David, who were kneeling near a side aisle beside one of the supporting pillars which was simple but powerful.

"The true pillars of God," Tim whispered, awed by the silence of the stone.

As I knelt, I believed in God as creator of the world and of artists and of architects. I believed in Him as the creator of the urge to build, and as the creator of the skill to build with the simplicity and beauty which pervaded the Basilica. I believed in Him as the creator of

hands so gifted as to carve the delicate figures in stone and wood which decorated the Church inside and out, and to depict with grace the figures chopping wood, feasting, dancing, and living the life of a village, which enriched the pews already rich with dark seasoned oak hundreds of years old.

"I believe in God," I whispered to Tim.

"We all do," Tim answered.

Later we went to a service in the Basilica, still in moods of reverence, and so were shocked when collecting bags were passed around, and loud whispers told us that we mustn't put less than twenty francs into them. Whilst all this was going on, the priest prayed, and children behind us giggled.

"He can't be sincere," we said, and stopped praying, worshipping in our own way by loving the country and the sea and the sun and the warm nights.

"Let's bathe," David suggested one evening, and as it was dark we slipped naked into the water, free like fishes, twisting and turning our bodies in the quietness, and as the moon appeared, we swam up the beam of light which was reflected in a dancing path on the sea until we thought we had gone too far.

"Come back now," someone whispered, a voice amongst the voice of the sea and the salt, and we swam back, panicking as we touched some swimming object, jelly fish or only weed. We dressed on the rocks, suddenly intimate in the shared sensations of the bathe, our bodies tingling as the coolness of the night crept into the air and into our breath.

"Wonderful, wonderful," said Tim softly, stretching his body, a silhouette against the moonlit sky, a growth from the dark smoothness of the rocks.

"You look like some plant," I said to him.

"I must kiss you now," Tim said, and gently we kissed, feeling like spirits meeting incidentally as we flitted across the world, and parted to stand looking out to sea, straining our eyes towards the horizon, which might have been any line we could imagine, so delicately did the sea merge with the sky.

Arm in arm David and Helen stood.

"I love you," David told Helen, and in the silence Helen replied, "I love you too tonight, David," and lovingly the four of us walked together along the coast, our spirits deserting our bodies to splash with the waves, to shine with the moon, to sleep with the rocks, and to blow softly, coolly with the night breeze which whispered love through the few trees, and love to the crickets which chirped incessantly, and love to the dry grass which grew sparsely along the fringe of the rocks so that the night was pervaded with love.

"Let's love tonight," Tim whispered, bending, desiring still more love.

"No," I said, too young to want any more than the pure love which saturated the night, "No, no more."

"We must complete the night. We shall see it escape and still be here, lost, missing something, if we don't love each other properly, fully, to-night. Please, Joan," said Tim, stopping me, holding me still, gazing at me. "Please, Joan," he repeated, and I saw the other two merge into the darkness ahead.

"We must go on," I said.

"But first we must love," Tim replied, still holding me, still looking at me, intensely, with desire.

"No," I said, and I became afraid. Afraid of the night, afraid of love, afraid of the drugging beauty of the night and afraid of the desire I saw in Tim's eyes. "No," I cried, and ran from Tim, across the rocks, back to-

wards the pension, jumping from rock to rock, till I came back to the village, and then breathless into the pension, and sobbed on my bed. Sobbed because I must have wanted to love Tim that night; sobbed because I didn't know how to love him; because I was afraid without wanting to be afraid, too filled with mixed emotions of love and fear to be calm. Then, sobbing still, shaking drily, I tired, and lying, still dressed, aware only of physical fear and emotional desire, fell asleep alone, careless of Tim and careless of Helen and David.

"How young you are," Tim said in the morning, sun-burnt, tall and happy. "I should like to teach you to love before we go. Why did you run away last night?"

"I was afraid," I admitted. "Afraid of spoiling the night."

"Was Helen afraid?" Tim asked, knowing, as I knew, that Helen had not been afraid. She had come into our room after dawn, waking me up, as I lay uncomfortably, still dressed, on my bed. She was shining with joy. Silently she shone, happily she slid into bed, and I too undressed and slipped into bed, smiling, because Helen's happiness was infectious.

"No," I replied to Tim. "You know she wasn't. But Helen loves David."

"Who do you love?" Tim asked, and I did not remember at once that I loved Richard. Then, as I knew, I was ashamed for the delay in knowing.

"I love a prisoner, the one to whom I sent a postcard." I replied.

"Has he been in prison long?"

"Three years."

"Weren't you too young to love anyone three years ago?" Tim asked, pop-popping at his pipe, looking at me through smoke.

"I haven't loved him for three years," I said, unwilling to talk to Tim about Richard.

"What's his name?" asked Tim, persisting like a bulldog at a rat.

"Why do you ask all these questions?" I asked, remembering how Richard had said almost the same to me when I questioned him during my first visit.

"Because I'm interested. I've never met anyone who loved a prisoner, and I have a naturally inquiring mind."

"Of course," I said attempting to divert Tim, "or you wouldn't be delving into such obscure things as French telephone systems."

"What's his name?"

I didn't want to tell Tim. I saw no reason why I should tell Tim, yet I felt guilty because I was being secretive. Suddenly I knew that I must tell him, that it was important that Tim should know.

"All right. His name is Richard Johnson."

"Good God!" said Tim, sweeping his pipe from his mouth with his right hand and holding it out so that the stem pointed towards the sea. "Good God!" he said, "What a bloody silly thing to do—to fall in love with Richard Johnson. Do you know him? Do you know what he's done? Do you know who he is? Where he comes from? Why he's in prison at all? Do you?" Tim stood in the little street outside the pension in the shade of the awning which stretched over tables and chairs. I sat at a table, a cup of coffee in front of me, looking up at Tim who was shouting at me, waving his pipe around in enormous gestures.

Blood rushed round my head, thumping behind my eyes and between my ears, knocking all the way down my throat, and banging at the walls of my stomach so that I felt sick and angry.

"Why should I know?" I shouted. "Why should it, why need it matter? What has it anyway got to do with you? Why do you shout at me? I hate being shouted at." As my hand came up involuntarily in a sweeping gesture to brush away Tim's shouting, my coffee cup was swept off the table and broke in the dust.

Tim, in one stride, came up to the table and sat down opposite me. I bent down to pick up the cup.

"Leave the cup," Tim said. "And now I'll tell you why you should know. I don't know why or how you fell in love with Richard Johnson, but it's an idiotic thing to do. He's not just a prisoner, he's a convict. He's a dangerous man—a man doesn't go to a prison like Finston for nothing—and I do know Richard Johnson. Richard Johnson is my cousin, my aunt's son. Do you see?" He stopped talking, and stood up again, and again, as his hair stuck out from his head untidily, I was reminded of a telegraph pole. I had become excited; I got up, and walked to Tim, and taking his arm I said,

"Tim, how wonderful. Tell me about Richard, tell me why he's in prison, tell me where he lives, tell me what he likes, where he went to school," and forgetting anything, forgetting even the strangeness of the coincidence, I saw Tim only as someone from whom I could learn about Richard, and the knowledge that Tim knew Richard made my love for Richard flood back into my system, and Richard seemed suddenly very near.

"Please, Tim, tell me," I begged, but we were no longer alone, for the sun was warming the place and already people were wandering down the street to the sea, and children shouting to each other and running, looking backwards as they ran and so bumping into other people, filled the place with noise. From the pen-

sion door David stood, contentedly stretching, watching the movement.

"Hello!" he said.

"Hello," we answered.

"Your last day." David reminded me.

"How awful," I said, but I didn't mind. I felt ready to leave, to go back and to think actively, and to occupy myself so that time passed. "Tell me later, Tim," I said.

"Yes, I will," he promised. "Tonight."

"Tim," David said, coming across the little street to join us, "I might go back with Helen and Joan."

"What, tomorrow?"

"Yes. Would you mind, Joan?"

"I'd be delighted," I said, not much minding. David was a person whom I liked, but in an abstract sort of way, so that we always enjoyed each other's company when we were together, but never missed it when we weren't.

Helen and David loved each other in a passing manner. Looking at them, one would say "they are in love," but looking into their future, one would know that neither was enough of a driving force to the other, enough of a stimulant, for their love to last. They, however, were too involved with their present to stand back and look objectively into their future.

I WANDERED down a long lane arm in arm with Tim, and trees, tall and green, swayed in disciplined lines on either side of us. The sun shone straight at us so that we sometimes turned round to look at our shadows, which were lithe and elongated impressions of ourselves. It was our day of departure.

"Such lovely days," I said. "How awful to go back."

"Yesterday you wanted to go back," Tim reminded me.

"Oh, well." For me likes and dislikes were momentary things. I might want to do something one day in one mood, but anything could change a mood.

"Tell me about Johnson now," I said, for the night before had slid by in farewell drinks, so that we had all moved together, talking in a reminiscent fashion about the fortnight we had spent together, and the weeks ahead when we would arrange to meet.

"Richard and I used to be good friends. He is older than me, and when I used to go and stay with my aunt in the north, Richard and I would wander about the moors, or go grouse shooting with his father, or fish, or do the things that small boys do. I was a great admirer of Richard, because everything he did, he did with tremendous fervour. Then we grew up, and I went up to Oxford and Richard got involved in an arctic expedition. My uncle is in a scientific firm, and friends of his were going off to do some arctic research, and wanted some young chap like Richard, or perhaps it was Richard who wanted to go, and my uncle asked the team to take him

—anyway he went. They were away two years, and Richard, apparently with tremendous enthusiasm, had trekked all over the place looking for rare birds and animals and whatnot, and had got frostbitten and snow-blind, and in fact thoroughly soused with all the nasty things one can get soused with on an expedition like that. He came back in a most extraordinarily bitter frame of mind, and all his fervour seemed to be devoted to aggressiveness. He seemed to be constantly exploding with belligerence, and once he attacked a man who bumped into his car. He hurt this man quite badly, but a good Counsel got him off with a fine. He went on and on doing this sort of thing, until he attacked some man with a weak heart, and this man died." Tim had talked quickly, shortening the story of Richard, so that I was not given time to picture his life at all. I had swift visions of moors, and iced boats struggling through ice floes watched by rows and rows of penguins flapping black wings, and of cars bumping and fists thumping.

"Is that all?" I asked. "Surely a doctor saw him, or somebody, a psychiatrist . . ." I knew that Tim had skated over the surface facts of Richard's life, leaving a depth of incidents covered.

"Yes, of course, there were doctors and psychiatrists. But apparently they weren't much good. He seems to be a dead loss as a decent human being. What makes you think you love him?"

"I know. It's just a thing that I know." I had no doubt about my love.

"Well, to be quite frank, I'm bored with Richard. I'm sorry he's got into prison and so on, but he did deserve it. He was a bloody fool, and I can't pity him. One can't go on excusing somebody indefinitely on the grounds

that they were once frostbitten. Go and see his mother if you like. I'll give you her address. I should write first. Don't bother me any more with him," Tim kicked a stone hard across the road, and squeezed my arm. "Enjoy the present," he said.

"I am," I said, aware of the shortness of time and the approaching end of an interlude.

"You are an interlude, Tim," I said. "The narrator in the Johnson drama." I wondered how I could look at the thing so objectively when I felt it all so deeply, and longed so much for Richard to be free to love me.

"One day he will be free," I continued. "I know. I'm not the kind of person who loves in vain." I was sure that eventually Richard and I would be free together. Already I knew one of his relatives, and it was in no obvious way that I had come to meet Tim, and it was far from obvious that Tim should be Richard's cousin.

"You see, it's fate." I told Tim, dismissing the future for the present, suddenly glowing happily in the certainty of fate's kindness, so that the blue sky again came into focus and my sunburned arms pleased me with their tan.

A Frenchman peddled by us on an old bicycle with a little girl perched uncomfortably on the bar.

"Bonjour," he shouted. "Vous partirez aujourd'hui?"

"Oui," I shouted, "Mais nous reviendrons, j'espère."

"Bien sûre," shouted the Frenchman, his voice trailing back to us with the dust left by the wobbling tyres of his machine, and the little girl leaned backwards to wave.

"Nice people," we said, and we both felt pleased that we had carved ourselves some sort of niche in the district.

"I shall miss you, Tim," I said, as we heard a clatter

of loose tin, which became louder and louder as the old car borrowed by David and Helen for the day came closer and closer. "I hope I can see you again sometime," I said hurriedly, wanting to tell Tim how much I liked him, before we were caught up in the necessary details of departure.

"You will see me again," he said. "You can interview me on my return. 'Brilliant young student discovers flaws in French telephones. Prevents international crisis.' A scoop! Of course we'll see each other again," he said, turning and standing across the road with his arms outstretched, so that his shadow looked like some enormous gorilla. The old car screeched over the shadow, stopping suddenly inches from Tim.

"I'm a brilliant driver," said David, laughing.

"If you hadn't been brilliant I could have excelled myself in medical skill," said Helen, laughing too, her hair untidy, her face suntanned and freckled. "Come on. Get in," she ordered.

Our rucksacks were in the back. Tim and I climbed on top of them. There was no roof to the ancient and decrepit vehicle, but it was a car of character.

"We must hurry, or we'll miss the train," David warned us, jerking the car forward and urging it on mercilessly, his foot flat on the accelerator. The antiquated car roared gallantly on, whirling us past ambulating cows, honking buses, children coming out of a tiny village school, old women gossiping, shouting men, chickens and farmyards, and finally down a steep hill to the station which looked like a cowshed.

It was only a branch line and the train which we wanted came through it twice a week. The platform was crowded with daughters who had married the man from the next station along the coast, or the next but

one station, and who came home every so often to visit 'Mum' with all their children. The gabbling of farewells, the kissing of cheeks, and the smell of garlic were all very French to us tourists. We were not returning by the same way we had come, not wanting to pass through Paris again, happy to chug along the coast slowly.

Tim and David carried our untidy luggage onto the platform. We didn't talk much because there wasn't much to say. How silently English we must have seemed. Then the train came in, and we hurled luggage into doors. David and Tim shook hands, and Tim and I kissed each other on both cheeks.

"Au revoir, Tim" we shouted, the train doors shut, "Drive back carefully." We were ready to go, but the train obstinately remained still.

Further along, French mothers went on kissing cheeks, repeating volubly messages and advice which must already have been exchanged a dozen times before.

We stood waiting. Tim was standing away from the train, looking up towards the engine.

"It's puffing," he told us, and as he stood there, casual in an open shirt, puffing like the train at his old pipe, his face serious and professor-like, I felt a strange pang of fondness for him.

"Don't forget us," I shouted, and he looked at us, suddenly smiling, so that the smile looked like a guest on his naturally serious face.

"I couldn't," he said, "could I?" and as the train moved slowly from the station he turned slightly and watched us going, his pipe held high in a farewell gesture. Then, before we were out of sight, he had turned to go, running from the platform, all legs and untidy fair hair.

The whole journey took two days, and was for me a

series of blurred impressions only: my thoughts moved with the motion of the train, so that at one moment I was aware of Helen and David, even talking to them, and then the next noticing, but as if from afar, Helen's head resting on David's shoulder, and hearing, but as if from the bottom of a deep pit, their voices; thinking all the time of isolated incidents which, being thought of, merged together into a blob of event and blended character. Thus I was, in my mind, talking to Tim and Richard together, and then it was Tim who was in the prison or Richard swimming beside me in the sea. At one moment I thought I had arrived at home and my parents greeted me, and beside them stood Hugh and Philip and they were all talking at once, so that only Philip's loud voice was clear as it reached over the others' in a greeting: "Welcome home, Joan," he was saying, and my mother was hugging me fondly, and I could see myself as a shape rushing from one to the other, and Hugh said: "I've got a dinner to write up, but tomorrow you must tell me about your holiday," and then he vanished, quite naturally, and Richard took my arm: "I've waited a long time," he said, and I was proud of him as he stood, tall and solid, beside me. "This is Richard," I said to my father, who smiled and shook hands with Richard, and then Tim appeared, walking hurriedly by. "Don't forget me," he said, "I'll phone at five to four," and I saw a long line of telegraph poles stretching away and I started to count them.

One, two, three.

"What are you doing?" Helen said, "counting telegraph poles?" Easily I returned to the present reality, so close was it to the imagined future and remembered past, and the train ran on beside a line of telegraph poles, until we came to a town, with small dirty streets,

bounding the railway line, and we were reminded of shampoos and drinks and chocolate, the names of these glaring at us from eye-level hoardings.

In London I left David and Helen.

"We'll spend a day or two in London," they said. "Will you stay too?"

"I must get back," I said. "I'm due back tomorrow," and so once again I found myself alone, travelling down to the coast, anticipating movement and events. Impatiently I waited to arrive, so that I could settle down and write to Richard's mother, and to Richard, and talk inconsequentially to my friends, living again the casual life which suited me so well.

"Hello!" said Philip in the office, "Back already?"

"Hello!" said Hugh, more slowly, smiling, "Tell me your startling stories—who are you in love with now? A fortnight away and you've probably altered the course of your life!"

"Good morning, Miss Reid," said the chief reporter. "I've got you down for County Court today. You'd better be off."

"Hello," said Diana. "I'm coming your way. You must tell me about your holiday."

When we got outside the office, Diana said:

"Come on, we've got plenty of time for some coffee," and as we sat in the usual cafe, our pencils and notebooks on the table beside us, I realised how past the past fortnight was.

"We didn't get to Italy," I told Diana. "We lazed on the coast of Brittany. We met two Englishmen, and what is most extraordinary, one of them turned out to be a cousin of Richard's."

"How odd!" Diana said. "Isn't it odd how things like that happen? Again and again they happen and every

time they seem odder. A friend of mine went to America two years ago with her husband, and went to have a hairdo in New York, and the girl who washed her hair was English and came from the same village—and that was in New York!"

We finished our coffee and went off to do our reporting.

"Come to lunch," Diana called. She had a flat near the County Court.

"I will," I said, happy with the friendliness of everybody.

I WROTE to Mrs. Johnson, explaining who I was. I told her that I was interested in her son, not that I was in love with him, and told her of how I had met Tim in France. I suggested that perhaps I could meet her if ever she came to visit Richard.

"Dear Miss Reid," she wrote. "How nice of you to write. I would very much like to meet you, especially since you have seen my son more recently than I have. I'm so glad you met Tim. We are all very fond of him.

"There is much I would like to discuss with you about Richard, but I will save it until we meet. We were, of course, very upset when he attacked the warder the day before he was to be released.

"He has mentioned you in a letter. Perhaps you could come up to Northumberland one weekend? Do let me know if and when you can come.

Yours sincerely,

Peggy Johnson."

I found that Richard was still not allowed visitors, and so I wrote to him, saying nothing about Tim. I felt far from him—more like a woman doing good work than a girl in love. I needed some personal contact with Richard. "Please write," I said at the end of my letter, and his reply, strangely tense and emotional, jerked me from my attitude of lounging, maternal sort of love, into a taut, eager love. I longed to be with Richard.

more than anything else in the world. Richard, when writing, was almost a poet and he could play with my senses, exhuming any dying emotion, in the same way as a pianist with an inspired touch can produce tones of love and beauty that reach deep down into a listener's heart.

I took Richard's letter, unopened, to a cliff overlooking the sea. I felt its fatness, and I held the envelope, loving it for a moment. Then I tore it open, and threw it from the cliff, holding the uncovered letter tightly in my hand. The envelope, caught in a breeze, glided tipsily down to the sea, and seagulls shrieking, hoping for food, swooped on it, and unable to stop fell on down towards the waves, before clumsily turning, climbing, wheeling, crying out in disgust. I watched the envelope until it reached the sea. A wave stretched up a spray of foam and whisked it away.

"Joan, dearest, I know you are back, I can feel that you are close, I can love you intensely, gazing inwardly at your image traced in my mind, stamped on my heart so indelibly that if I look at a wall I can see you, and if I look at the sky I can see you, and if I watch a bird flying I can see you flying too; flying and laughing, as free as the bird, yet hovering over me because you cannot help it. You cannot help revolving around me, I cannot help wanting you to be near so that I have only to cry 'Joan, Joan,' and then know for a certainty that you will say 'coming, coming.' For that moment, which caught us both moving in totally different directions, forcefully turned us face to face, so that only you were in front of me, leaving me no alternative future. That moment will leave a lasting impression on my mind and, I hope, on

yours. So always you will know me as a convict, and always I will know you as a young, cold girl, shivering, and always I will know that I, and only I, can warm you, whether it be with fire or love. Remember that, for whilst you have been away I have tried to dismiss you from my mind. Knowing that my body is imprisoned, I want my heart and my thoughts at least to be free. I have desired and commanded them to be free because I cannot bear a static sort of love. I have no wish to sit and love, dreaming romantically of what I might be saying, doing, feeling, and yet against my wish I am sitting dreaming romantically of what I might be saying, doing, feeling, and my instinct says 'keep quiet, tell no one, for your feelings are deep, your thoughts are magnified from lack of space, your heart must not be uncovered, already you are too exposed.' Dearest, I am so exposed, so open to the slightest touch of your thoughts, so wishful for the slightest response to my love, that I can only present myself by proxy on a sheet of paper, and only in words, which are but rough symbols of thoughts and feelings, can I try to convey to you this unreasonable tenderness which I have for you, this ridiculous desire which swoops across me when I am eating or shaving or reading or working somewhere out on the moors, digging, chopping, or building, so that I want to carry you up to sleep with me on a cloud, to be blown with me across the world and across space into some paradise where we can absorb each other and become a cloud of our own, unreachable, untouchable, and alone, surrounded only by beautiful colours, music, and soft round strong shapes, and weird beautiful noises—So you have me. You have my soul, my mind, and my heart on a platter

before you, and the platter may be dull and it may be heavy, and it lacks my body, but my body too will come in time—I mean it to come now, and my whole self will be devoted to the moment when I can say ‘I am here, I am whole, I intend to love you, you must love me.’ In my loneliness I have become selfish, and I repudiate all that I said in my last letter telling you to forget me, to treat me casually. Now I command you, being in no position to command you, to love me. To love no one else, ever. To live only for me. To trust completely in the strange force which made us meet, and made us love. Because I know it is right. I know now without any doubt that it was right, and without knowing you, I do know you, all knowing that can be conveyed in words being mere decoration to the fundamental point of love.

“And so, with nothing hidden, I will end. I can only write in this way because my news is my thinking and my feeling. Inevitably, therefore, it is concentrated. I love to hear your news, which is doing and seeing—so write to me. Write to me often, and soon perhaps I can be seen. You can come to see me like a baboon in a cage, and sometime I will explain to you why I am here and how I am here.

“Take care of yourself because I love you.”

“Do you think he really loves you?” Hugh asked, as we stood watching a liner coming closely past the coast, passengers lined up along the deck looking like insignificant pegs. “I think he loves you because you are the first outlet for his affectionate nature.”

“No, Hugh, you don’t understand. Why do you try?” I was angry with Hugh for being so sensible. “Don’t be so sensible,” I said.

"I am only making wise observations, and if they were not true, or not nearly true, you wouldn't mind."

"Oh," I said annoyed. "It is so easy to be nearly right, and words so often sound right when they're quite wrong." I turned to walk away.

"Don't go," Hugh said. "Don't just turn away because I'm saying what I think. Do you mind what I think?"

"Yes, I do. Of course I do."

"Well, I think both your love and Johnson's love is founded on a dream. Now I won't say any more about it."

"Do you love anyone?" I asked Hugh.

"Yes, of course. But not in the way you do. I am attracted by someone. I go to bed with her. I laugh with her and talk with her, but I leave her whole, I leave in complete possession of myself. I don't think of her as a Goddess Almighty."

"Is that really love?"

"Yes, that is really love. Your sort of adoration isn't real. It's adolescent."

"Well, of course, if I'm adolescent, my love is bound to be adolescent, but that's no reason why it shouldn't be real?"

"It is a reason. Adolescent love is half real, half imaginary. It is half felt and half imagined. Imagined from what you have seen or read or been told about."

"Perhaps I can't love," I said, hopelessly defeated, because all my feelings of Richard were to me feelings of love—yet Hugh made me doubt that they were true feelings. Were they feelings that I imagined to be love? Were they just growing pains? Was I feeling things that I wanted to feel? "But it hurts to love Richard," I cried, knowing that I could not want pain.

"It hurts, Hugh, hurts," I said, drumming my words into him, demanding some reassurance.

"You love other people too, though. You have so much love, it seems."

"Yes, of course I do. Of course I love other people. Of course I have a lot of love. Who hasn't? And mine was woken up and stimulated by Richard, but Richard is in prison. So I have a mass of love to spend, I admit. I'm bursting with it. What is wrong with loving a lot of people? What is wrong? Why do you speak disapprovingly?"

We stood talking to the wind which blew inland from the sea, strengthening as the sky darkened, carrying our words off, so that they suddenly seemed stupid and unimportant. The wind would always blow, but our words wouldn't last. "Won't last, won't last" the wind whispered derisively, and Hugh echoed the words as the wind blew over him.

"It won't last," he said.

"It will," I said, thinking of my love.

"It won't," he said, turning from the wind, "it will be gone in the morning."

"Gone?" I said.

"Gone," he repeated. "This wind won't last." And pushed by the sudden strength of the gust, we walked away from the sea, no longer bothering to talk.

"I'm going up to Northumberland," I said later, picturing windy moors, covered more softly than our southern moor, peopled by wilder men and women.

"A smoky place," Hugh said, and into my picture came tall chimneys which smoked blackly, darkening the moors and the sky.

"It's a good place," Diana said, speaking proudly of her home county. "You'll be surprised by the speed at

which people do things, and by their determination. Northerners are so much more determined than southerners.

"Then why come south?" muttered Philip, disliking Diana's constant comparisons between north and south.

"We'll expect you back in four days, Miss Reid," said the chief reporter. "Don't get lost."

I felt quite lost standing on the platform in Newcastle. I wondered why I was there.

"But I am here," I assured myself, "someone will meet me."

"Miss Reid?" queried a voice, and a chauffeur stood beside me.

"Yes."

He picked up my suitcase and I followed him along the platform. The porter gave me back my return ticket:

"Quite chilly this morning," he said, nodding to the chauffeur.

We drove quickly through Newcastle, which was still in the early morning. I was impressed by the large dignity of the buildings.

"I expected a dirty place," I said to the chauffeur.

"You'll like the bridge," he said, and we crossed the Tyne on the bottom layer of a bridge. Overhead, on the top tier, a train roared across.

"It sounds like a volcano erupting," I said, and the bridge seemed to shake in terror.

"Have you ever heard a volcano erupt, Miss?" asked the chauffeur.

"No. But I'm sure it sounds like a train going over Newcastle bridge," I said, thinking of how often one compares something with something else that one only imagines.

Below the bridge to our left the river flowed widely.

I could see another bridge, a far more simple one for road traffic only, and almost below us, beside a small dock, floated a white liner.

"She's Swedish," the chauffeur told me, stopping the car so that I could gaze downstream, awed by the width and stateliness of the scene. Newcastle seemed to me, early in the morning, to be a solid city, firm with age and history. If Newcastle had been human, it would be sitting peacefully in a club, smoking a cigar, and reading *The Times*.

"We should be back just in time for breakfast," the chauffeur told me, driving on.

"Is there just Mrs. Johnson at home?" I asked.

"Oh no. Colonel Johnson has quite a few friends staying. He has someone staying most weekends, but they amuse themselves, you know. A lot of people are always coming to see him."

"What does he do?" I asked.

"Well he's got a business in town, and he runs this amateur theatre. I expect you've heard of it. It gets lots of publicity."

I had not heard of it, and so I said nothing, thinking that the chauffeur would be more offended than shocked to think that someone did not know of his employer's theatre.

We drove for about ten miles along a small winding road which whisked through the most unexpected places. Darting suddenly between two barns, it would dive down to a narrow bridge, under which a stream ran busily babbling around rocks, and then up again as straight towards the sky as it could, so that the chauffeur had to change into bottom gear and let the car struggle slowly up until it reached the top. Then we would keep along the top, with the country stretching away as if it

was nowhere and need never stop stretching.

We arrived at the village of Little Sicklon, driving slowly round a bend and sinking into a small valley.

"Is this where Richard was born?" I asked, speaking my thoughts.

"Mr. Richard? Yes, Miss. But he's not here now, you know."

"No, I know," I said.

The car seemed to saunter up the drive which was long and straight, a finger pointing to the house and reaching it with a circular flourish.

"Just in time for breakfast," said Mrs. Johnson, small and grey-haired. "I'm so glad you've come. Leave your luggage."

"Good morning," said many voices, and chairs scraped as people half stood and scraped again as they sat. The smell of coffee mingled with the smell of bacon, and the slow disjointed talk was early morning talk, and the rustle of papers accompanied odd mumbled phrases. I sat and ate, unnoticed because nobody noticed anything; at ease because everybody was at ease.

"I've asked Tim to come up for the weekend, as you know him. I thought you might like to go to the ball they're having here tonight." Mrs. Johnson came and sat beside me at the long, wide, mahogany table.

"Thank you. I'd like to very much. But I haven't got a dress."

"Oh, we'll fix you up with something."

We went out into the garden and walked along a paved path between rounded flowerbeds and long herbaceous borders. We stopped by a pond and stood looking down into the water.

"I feed the goldfish every morning," Mrs Johnson said, throwing some toast, crumbled up, into the water. Al-

most immediately slow orange fish came from under the water lilies and weeds to feed.

"Tell me how you know Richard?" Mrs. Johnson asked. I watched her hand shooting out over the water with crumbs.

"I met him in the prison early one morning, and I liked him at once. I was caught by the way he moved and by his voice and his face, and when we looked at each other there seemed to be a sudden contact." I was afraid that I was saying too much. "It sounds impossible and primitive—like animals."

"I do understand, of course I understand. No mother ever wonders how anyone can like, or love, her own son. There is something very striking about Richard, but, you know my dear, I must tell you, that this, well I'll say quality for want of another word, of his has been badly misused. I am sure Richard could have been someone great, and could have achieved something worthwhile, because as a child and a very young man he had tremendous enthusiasm and fervour and was very capable. But I am not going to mince my words. There is no doubt at all that Richard is now a vicious man. Why, God knows!"

She put her hand to her head, and quickly stroked over her hair. She had a wide forehead, with eyebrows straight like Richard's, and deep set blue eyes wrinkled all around. Her nose was straight with the same receding nostrils as Richard. Her mouth was good humoured, straight in repose, but usually one side tilted up more than the other. She was small and neatly dressed.

"Tim wrote to me and told me that you were in love with Richard." She looked at me, and her gaze was Richard's gaze, and I did not know what to say. "Are you?"

"I think so."

"If you love him, you should know." She spoke quietly, her quiet voice insinuating itself into tones of authority. She would never need to speak loudly to be heard.

"I am not going to be kind to you," she said, the manner in which she spoke being kind anyway. "My husband and I have done everything we can for Richard. We have had doctors, psychiatrists, quacks of all sorts, and we have spent a lot of money in trying to cure him of this viciousness which suddenly seems to overpower him. But it isn't an illness—you must believe that parents take a lot of convincing when told that their son is a vicious and brutal man. That he is made that way. We have wondered how it could be true. What is vicious about us?"

What, I wondered, feeling the peace of the place, the quietness of the garden, and the house calmly standing as it had done for years and years, and the peacefulness of Mrs. Johnson herself.

"We have our own lives to live, and we have accepted the fact that Richard is better in prison than out."

Wastes of time and space and feeling; bottomless pits reaching down and down with faint glimmers of fantastic light running through them; colourless lands reaching to endless horizons; I felt like any of those, or a part of any of those. My life was founded on a pretence, so final was the effect of Mrs. Johnson's words.

She was a strong person, and strength and peace were around her. Yet she had said "better in than out." Calmly she had said it, resigned utterly to the fact, but resigned after years and years.

"Is there nothing, nothing?" I said, trying to think of something, anything. We walked away from the pond

along a tall wall. On a stone pedestal a small statuette of a child, naked, holding up a basket filled with baby birds, stood, shadowed and lively, in the sun. My hand slid down the side of the statuette, caressing the curves of the cold stone; "Nothing, I suppose," I repeated and stood dazed, unbelieving whilst Mrs. Johnson talked to a gardener.

"Some flowers," I heard her say, asking for some bright colours to decorate the house.

"You must accept it," Mrs Johnson said, "It's no use pretending. You could cheat yourself for years." She remembered something, and turned to the gardener. "Could you bring some more peas into the house, and we'll want two more chickens killed for tomorrow." Then she came back to me. "I wanted to see you, to tell you this. It is so much better, and so much more conclusive."

"Thank you—yes I would go on loving him, I suppose. I'm not quite sure if I've stopped suddenly."

"Now you are here you must enjoy your weekend. My husband will show you over his theatre later. It's his baby."

Already busy planning the day, involved with living. Mrs. Johnson, unconsciously, dismissed me, so that I felt a little foolish because of the intensity of my feelings. of my strong belief in Fate. And even then I felt that there might yet be an unexpected end to the affair. Our meeting must have meant something. I assured myself, returning to the house alone. I walked along the grass enjoying its springiness, feeling slightly afraid of all the people who were staying in the house too.

Wide steps led up to the front of the house which looked across the garden and beyond it to a long steep hill which ran away from the house; on the brow of the

hill ran a small wall built of dark, harsh looking stone. Hundreds of sheep seemed to graze on the hill, and I wondered if the constant angle at which they ate, and slept, was bad for their digestion.

"Just up for the weekend?" asked a man coming slowly down the steps to join me, as I stood on the lawn.

"Yes," I replied, wondering who he was. He looked distinguished, with deep grey hair stretching thickly backwards over his head, and a large strong nose. He had a slight stoop, and bushy eyebrows which gave him an expression of amazement. His voice was deep.

"It's lovely here at this time of the year." He sniffed contentedly. "And what do you do?"

"I work on a newspaper."

"Do you? I used to myself at one time. It's a good sort of occupation." He looked at me. "You won't stay there though will you? Is it your first job?"

"Yes," I answered, wondering why he was showing so much interest. I never expected people to notice me.

"Just looking at you, and without knowing you at all," he said, "I should say you won't stick it! Not because it's too tough or anything like that—but you have an unsettled sort of look about you." He smiled. "Don't look so annoyed. I'm an old man and you are a young girl which gives me the right to say anything I like. Have you seen the goldfish this morning?"

Together we walked down to the goldfish pond.

"They have been fed once by Mrs. Johnson," I said.

"Hmm," he said, watching the fish. "Are you interested in dramatics—in the theatre, and acting and all that sort of nonsense?"

"Yes—but I don't know much about it."

"Well, if you're interested, learn. How I hate that sort of answer—'Yes, but.' Your generation's a lazy lot.

I've got a daughter—a bit older than you, but she's just as bad. 'Do you like music?' I ask. Just like you she says 'Yes, but I don't know anything about it.' 'Well, go and learn something about it,' I tell her. 'Don't just sit back and accept the fact that you know nothing about it,' How do you spend your leisure? Gallivanting about at dances and things, I suppose? You probably never look at a book. I don't suppose you know that any other dramatist except Shakespeare ever wrote plays—and you probably only know that because you were taught it at school." He stalked away from the pool, and I followed him.

"Now you are indignant because like all young people you think you know enough of everything."

"I'm not," I said. "I agree with you."

"Well," he continued, ignoring my attempt to say something, "You have no right to be indignant. You young people are always springing to defend yourselves—but you've got nothing to defend. Learning seems to be obsolete—not only are vast sums of money wasted on education, but good brains are wasted too. What do you know? Nothing. Yet I expect you've been educated, or rather been to a school to be educated—You probably can't even spell. Or can you?"

He stopped talking, and grinned at me, almost maliciously.

"Are you a playwright?" I asked.

"Yes, though God only knows why. What on earth's the use of writing good plays when there's no one to appreciate them?"

"I often wonder," I said "what is the use of knowing things. How does it help one to live? And surely all that matters ultimately are the things that last—like, well hills and the sea, and the sun . . ."

"Oh dear! I think I shall have to take you into a little room and sit you down at a table and lecture to you for hours."

Colonel Johnson came out of the house, and we went up the steps onto a long terrace which ambled along the length of the house.

"Charles," said my playwright, "Do you realise that you have staying in your house a girl who doesn't believe in learning? She doesn't see the use of reading, and writing and all that sort of thing?"

"I didn't say that," I said.

"But you meant it."

I shook hands with Colonel Johnson, who was a big man; twice the size of his wife, with a sensitive face which was never still; his expression changed from second to second. "Have you two been introduced? You mustn't let Nathan bully you; he loves attacking the 'younger generation'—he loves them you know! Nathan, meet Miss Reid."

"Joan," I said.

"Joan, meet Sir Nathan Clunn."

"How do you do," said Sir Nathan, and suddenly awe-struck I found myself shaking hands with the distinguished playwright who had two plays running in London, and who had, two or three years previously, been knighted for his services to the Theatre.

"I have heard of you," I said, "and I have seen your plays."

"That," said Sir Nathan, "is fame. Seriously though, Joan, you must not go on any longer thinking that learning is not worthwhile, or that it is meaningless."

"Surely it's a phase one goes through when one is young?" said Colonel Johnson. "I'm sure when I was young and suddenly noticed what an awful lot of stuff

had been written, and was still being written, I lost heart and thought how useless it all was. Surely we all thought that?"

"And if we hadn't had some old walruses, like ourselves, to show us it wasn't true we might have gone on thinking like that," said Sir Nathan.

"You must see, Joan, that art and literature is worthwhile. What made the world? Do you believe in God, and do you believe that the earth was made for some purpose? If you do, and I simply cannot see that there is anything else to believe, then you must believe that men's minds were made to create. I regard the arts as a sort of religion. I think they are the only things which keep people sane, and give them any standards of life. There is something very pure about creation. I make all my money out of my business, but if I was faced with the alternative of business or theatre, I'd keep my theatre any day. Because that, I believe, is the important side of my life. That is how my values are, and that is how I think values should be. If your mind is rich, then you are rich. What on earth do you think makes people able to string a lot of words together so that they can rouse feelings of sympathy in a reader, evoke tears and laughter and anger? I believe certain people are made to write or to paint so that they can show other people the way to live. In a way I think of them as disciples, not of Jesus Christ, but of the spirit we call God—we can't attempt to understand God, and as you grow older you will stop attempting—but the writer, or musician is as close to understanding as anyone because he is producing something which must be inspired by God." Colonel Johnson was talking now on a subject that meant a lot to him. "We have to believe this. I don't

see how anyone can create anything without believing it."

"Oh now, Charles," said Sir Nathan, unable to let this pass, "I can't let you get away with this. You'll be teaching the youth of the country that they are all gods, and that all they have to do is to sit down in front of a piece of paper with a pen in their hands and a blank expression on their faces and inspired phrases, or pictures, or what have you, will come bursting into their minds and they'll be great. No, no. What you say is all very well, but I am not prepared to believe that a writer is any more a disciple of God's than is a gardener, or blacksmith."

There was a scuttle of paws on stone and two large poodles appeared on the terrace, all bounce and wool.

"Get down, you brutes," said Colonel Johnson.

"Don't be brutal to my dogs," said Mrs. Johnson, coming round from the back of the house. "Now, what are you going to do? Dave is just off to meet Tim. Would you like to go with him, Joan?"

"Yes, very much," I said.

"We've just been telling your young friend what valuable people we writers are," said Sir Nathan.

"She'll probably never look at a book now," answered Mrs. Johnson.

"I'm quite silenced," I admitted, unable to say anything that I felt would be of any value to the conversation; just listening and watching, intrigued.

"When you come back," said Colonel Johnson, "I will take you to see my theatre."

"Where are the others?" enquired Sir Nathan.

"Walking or talking. I don't know which," said Mrs. Johnson. "We have well-behaved guests who look after

themselves," she said to me, as I followed her into the house.

Dave, I discovered, was the chauffeur. He told me that he sometimes made the trip three or four times a day at weekends. "People are always coming," he said.

He told me that Tim was treated as a second son by the Johnsons. "They were very upset about Mr. Richard."

"He's in prison isn't he?" I said.

"Yes, Miss. He was a nice chap at times. We all liked him. But he could be dangerous. He knocked one of the gardeners about here one day for saying something which didn't quite please him. He used to be quite rough as a little boy, but that didn't matter so much. It wasn't so funny as a big man. He just didn't seem to be able to control himself. He was worse after he came back from the Arctic."

"It's not fair," I told myself, "to think about Richard Johnson up here. They all know him too well; he is too close to them all, and they can't judge him properly."

"Here we are, Miss."

I switched my mind to Tim, and found myself pleased at the thought of seeing him so soon.

With the puff of an engine I met Tim, as with a puff we had parted.

Tim in England was quite different from Tim in France. A tidy young man was coming towards me, his fair hair smooth, but his face was still sunburnt.

He took my hand and handed his suitcase to Dave. We looked at each other, surprised at the meeting.

"Did you have a good journey?" I asked.

"Do you really want to know? No you don't. You can't think of anything else to say, you're so pleased to see me." Tim laughed at me, he was brimming over with

good spirits, his whole body was laughing, he walked with a bouncing step. His face was happy—he no longer looked like a worried professor.

"You've changed," I told him. "Why are you so happy?"

"Seeing you," he said. "How very nice to be in Northumberland again. I'll take you across the moors tomorrow, you look in need of exercise." In Tim's company I relaxed, his mood was infectious.

Colonel Johnson took us all over to his theatre that afternoon. We drove along a bumpy cart track to a building which looked like a barn in the corner of a large grass field.

"It was a barn until I converted it," he said. "We are doing one of Nathan's plays at the moment. Quite a good one too."

"You can see it tonight," said Sir Nathan. "You can start your education this evening."

"It's the last night. We're ending up with a ball."

The barn had been admirably converted, and seated about two hundred and fifty people. The stage had been heightened enough to allow plenty of room for dressing rooms underneath.

"Where the cow slept, here sleep I," chanted Sir Nathan as we stood behind the stage examining the props, which leaned against the railings of an old cow shed.

"Afternoon, sir." A broad man, with a broom under his arm appeared. He was wearing a policeman's blue shirt.

"Good afternoon, Cowdray. Joan, meet our principal actor, In his spare time he's our local policeman."

"Good afternoon, Miss; you'll be coming to the last performance, I hope?"

"Now, meet the author."

"Very pleased to meet you sir. I think it's an excellent play. Best we've had for some time."

"You look exactly as I imagined the captain should look," said Sir Nathan, talking of the play.

"We have to shout loudly because the roof's so high," said Colonel Johnson, and we looked up to the tall thatched roof.

"It's an awful business in the nesting season," Tim said. "Poor old Cowdray spends hours cleaning the seats."

The public entrance to the theatre was through a small door at the back. At one time the stockman might have come through it, pitchfork in hand, to get hay for the cattle. The cattle yard was now a car park.

"We had to turn two hundred people away; all our booking is done in advance now we've become so popular," Colonel Johnson said. "We even get *The Times* critic up here."

"How many plays do you do a year?" I asked.

"Four or five. It gives us plenty of time. We build all our own scenery."

A tractor was driven up to the house that evening, and attached to it was an elegant trailer complete with a tarpaulin awning and straw bale seats.

"All men onto the trailer," said Mrs. Johnson, ushering her dinner-jacketed guests through the front door. "Come on, Nathan. Stop fussing."

"What a bully you are," said Sir Nathan, enjoying it.

"We women will go more comfortably in the car," said Mrs. Johnson, and in evening dress we climbed into the car, and following the tractor drove off to the Theatre.

"A wonderful way to travel," said Lady Clunn, and

we bumped once more along the cart track, and round into the cattle yard.

"Cows this way," shouted Sir Nathan to us, climbing stiffly off the trailer, looking like a king in his evening clothes.

It was a warm night. I felt like dancing in the field. "Let's dance," I said to Tim.

"I think I will seduce you tonight," Tim said. "It would be so romantic in an old cowshed."

"Not without the cows," I said, imagining the smell of cows, soft and milky, and we wandered into the theatre, which was already filling. Many people had come from as far as Newcastle, and some even further. There were a lot of specially invited guests who were to stay for the ball. Everyone wore evening dress.

Gas lamps hissed and sighed on the walls, and the soft lights which they gave out made the place seem unreal.

"Of course we are dreaming," I said, enchanted by the sight of evening dresses against the rough walls, and the floating light, which only just reached the highest point of the roof.

The play was a comedy. Sir Nathan glowed with pleasure as we laughed, and clapped, and laughed, and the actors grinned and laughed, taking curtain call after curtain call. Afterwards we floated out of the Theatre through the large side door which was almost as tall as the theatre itself into the field where the grass was dampening with dew and the air was pleasantly cool.

"Did Richard ever act here?" I asked Tim, unable to dismiss him from my mind.

"Yes. He was rather good. He enjoyed ranting on the stage. He has a splendid voice which he hurled around the place."

I yearned at that moment for Richard's voice, which I had heard even before I saw him. "I can't believe that anyone with his qualities can be really bad," I said. "He writes fluently, he talks fluently—he can't be bad."

"Bad in society. If one could extract his viciousness he would be all right. But you can't do that. Anyway don't talk about Richard whilst you are here. They have been very brave about him."

"But I came here to talk about him."

"Because I asked my aunt to tell you about him; I suggested she should invite you here; see?"

"Did you really, Tim?" I could not understand Tim. He seemed too casual to feel things. He kept himself hidden behind a facade of haphazardness. He was sensitive, with quickly changing moods. But he never exposed himself; I always had the feeling that his essential self, the self that would make one able to say "He is this," or "He is that," was kept strictly imprisoned, so that one could only say "He seems this," or "He seems that."

"Come on," Tim said. "We will dance."

On the wall of the large oblong hall in which we were dancing hung a portrait of Richard as a small boy. He stood proudly, in riding clothes, his hand on the back of a chair, his eyes gazing off, away out of the picture into the distance.

We danced, closely, and pretending that Tim was Richard I pressed close to him, enjoying the intimacy. When Tim laid his face on my head I almost believed that it was Richard's face, and with my eyes closed I imagined us—Richard and I—dancing together. I imagined his eyes gently smiling with his mouth as he held me, guiding me, and I saw myself, submissive, moving with him, as part of him.

"He can't be bad," I thought again.

"He is bad," said Tim suddenly, pursuing the same line of thought. "You must understand that. You must allow yourself to understand it."

The band switched from a slow waltz to some quicker rhythm; we turned round and round, catching quick glimpses of faces; quick smiles, quick frowns caused by a painful heel or toe, quick words brought out staccato, quick laughs, whilst the band glistened with sweat from the heat of their exertions which kept their whole bodies moving. Their feet tapped, urged on by their legs; their arms were busy with their instruments, their eyebrows expressed the whole tone of the music, shooting rhythmically up and down.

"This is primitive stuff," Tim said. "It should appeal to you."

"It does."

With a long howl of a chord the band stopped. The dancing ceased, and reluctantly the dancers moved from the floor.

"They needed the rest I suppose," I said as we went towards the bar.

"I haven't been to a dance like this for years and I'm loving it," Sir Nathan was saying.

"I enjoyed the play," I said.

"Did you? It is good isn't it? Don't get plays written, or for that matter acted, like that nowadays."

"Oh, nonsense," said Colonel Johnson. "Your plays are excellent—but there are excellent plays being written now, more than ever before, and some first rate actors."

"Then why should the London theatres have to resort to running two of my plays?"

"Things of quality always last—are always wel-

comed back. Would you ever have written them if you thought that they would be acted once, and then thrown away?"

"I was damn sure they would be thrown away—I don't believe writers write with the idea that their work is going to last for ever. I think they write because they have to—they feel they must—it's like blowing your nose—sometimes you just have to blow it, or else remain bunged up." Sir Nathan blew his nose, decisively.

"I don't believe that you would have gone on writing plays if your first ones hadn't had the success which they have had."

"I would have written no matter what anyone said, and no matter how much they flopped. I would have known that it was the public who were just too damn stupid to recognise good stuff when they saw it. When I started writing I was a conceited fellow. I thought my stuff was good and though I would have been bitterly disappointed if it hadn't been recognised as good stuff, I should still have thought it good myself. You know I wrote three plays that were absolute flops before my first success."

"Now, you boys, stop talking shop." Lady Clunn came up. She was wearing a simple black evening dress, just covering her shoulders in a sweeping line. Her face was strong and handsome, her hair grey, and her tall body seemed unaware of its age; it ignored any suggestion that it should stoop a bit to suit the grey hair; it preferred to be straight and suit the dignity of Lady Clunn.

The band was playing again and I danced with Colonel Johnson.

"I've heard about you and Richard," he said. "Richard wrote from prison. He said you'd been to see him."

I was quiet, waiting for more words. For a few minutes we danced in silence. Colonel Johnson slid over the floor, so that I felt as if we were on skates, gliding along, making no effort.

"I've also heard from the prison governors. He won't be released for three or even five years—and then only if he shows no signs of aggressiveness."

I listened but I could not believe.

"We would like you to go on seeing and writing to Richard, but you must not have any hopes of a future for him.—It's a hard thing for a father to say, but Richard will never be a normal decent person. It has broken our hearts, but there's not the slightest need for it to break yours."

"If there was a war . . ." I wondered, still dancing, still unbelieving, still entangled with the idea of Fate.

"You must straighten yourself out," Colonel Johnson said. "I think that perhaps you rather enjoy the complications of loving Richard?"

"I think I just enjoy loving Richard," I said, not knowing, remembering that Hugh had once told me that you had to wait to know; that you had to let events and feelings gradually focus themselves before you could start analysing them. Tim came up.

"Here we are again," he said, and we were dancing together for a minute before the dance ended; then we stood side by side, our hands just touching, whilst the National Anthem reminded us that we were not whole in ourselves but a bit of a country-wide feeling; pieces of grass in a wide green field, specks of soot in a mighty chimney.

"I'm so glad you came," Tim said, "and now we will 'take a turn' around the garden and I will kiss you under the chestnut tree."

“I don’t know whether I want to,” I said, wondering whether I did or not; being given the moment to decide, and yet incapable of decision.

“**A**RE you taking Joan onto the moors?” Mrs. Johnson asked Tim the next morning.
“Yes, I am.”

“Don’t get lost,” said Sir Nathan, as we went out, rustling a Sunday paper, snorting over the reviews.

“Are you glad,” Tim shouted, outside, “that you kissed me under the chestnut tree last night?”

“Yes,” I shouted, breathless, pulling myself up a steep bank by clinging to tufts of grass, my mouth filling with air so that I almost choked. Then we were right on top of the moors which stumbled about everywhere, tufted and wild.

“Lovely, isn’t it?” Tim called. “I always feel like running madly when I get up here. I always think that I’m a boy again, because I was a boy when I first saw the moors.”

“It’s funny,” I yelled, “how a first impression lingers so that you always behave in the way you behaved in the first instance. It’s almost a duty not to change in some places, or with some people.”

“When I go home I’m always expected to be a funny serious little boy,” Tim went on, “with my nose in a book—the result is that I always am serious when I go home and always do bury my nose in a book. I have no idea what goes on there—if anyone asks me to a party and my mother answers the invitation she makes the most magnificent excuses for me, and I haven’t the

heart to tell her that I'm really an enthusiastic party-goer."

"Poor you," I said, running crazily across the stumpy ground, swerving to avoid holes, jumping from one tuft to another, laughing because it felt so good, unable to stop, my legs getting into the rhythm of running and jumping.

"I don't think I want your sympathy," puffed Tim. "It's too bloody maternal!"

We ran until we reached a high point.

"There's the road."

I looked along Tim's pointing arm and saw a rough orange coloured track a few hundred yards from us coming from and disappearing into a dip.

"It's all right in the summer, but after it's rained it is quite impassible—by car anyway."

A small red car was coming slowly along the road, bumping badly across the rutted parts. We walked towards the road, and as the car neared us it stopped. A man got out. He was wearing thick glasses and studying some sort of map. A girl was driving. She seemed short, and dark haired—she had a pleasant sort of face.

"Do you know where Hayter's Castle is?" the man called to me; he was wearing a bright yellow tie with large brown spots, and a dark blue shirt.

"I'm a stranger here," I said with great delight.

"How very annoying," said the man, obviously expecting me to know the answer, put out because his calculations were wrong. He drew back, his map held out in front of him, his thumb marking the point where he thought we were at that moment. "Doesn't know," I heard him say to the girl.

"Do you, Tim?"

"No. What sort of place is it?"

"It's a ruin—dates back to the 10th Century." Impatiently he turned to get back into the car.

"I know," said Tim. "Of course I know. We used to have gun fights there as boys. It's just a heap of stones. You're on the right road."

"I knew that," said the man, "but it's off the road."

"Conceited ass," Tim said to me. "We'll come with you," he said to the man, whose mouth, for an instant bent upwards in a movement that was intended for a smile.

"Hop in," said the girl, and we climbed over the back of the little red car, which was open, and we felt it sag.

"Will it make it?" I asked.

"Oh, yes." She smiled cheerfully.

"Now we are here," said the man, "I will just disappear behind that gorse bush." He walked off stiffly, his head held at an angle, so that if his eyes were looking in the same direction as his nose was pointing he would have been gazing at a little black cloud just above the horizon. He still held his map stiffly in his right hand. From behind we could see his hair thick and long stretching back so that it nearly touched his collar; but he had a short neck. I imagined that if one got close to him he would smell.

"He's writing a book," the girl explained. "I'm just driving him about for the fun of it."

He stalked about the ruins with a large loose leaf notebook, and the three of us sat swinging our legs from a large oblong stone watching him and talking.

"I don't get paid," the girl said. "But it doesn't cost me anything because he buys the petrol and if we stay in a hotel he pays the bill."

"A wonderful way to get around." Instinctively I liked the girl "Where do you go next?"

"Oh, we're spending the night in Newcastle.

"Come and have a drink at the 'Star'," Tim suggested.

"Good idea," said the girl. "I need it. It'll be quite a relief to relax for an instant. I'm always trying to be more intelligent than I am."

He came back, reading his notes as he walked.

"A drink," we suggested. "At the 'Star'."

"I never drink horizontally," he said, smiling at us, but not thinking about us. "I've got a lot of letters to write. I think we should press on."

"Well, I want a drink," the girl said.

"In that case we must have one, since you're driving."

"It will do you good," I said.

We pressed into the little bar on the dot of six. It was a warm autumn evening and so we sat on the bench outside.

"Like a lot of old hens," the man complained. We introduced ourselves after the first drink. Her name was Peggy, his Henry.

"Where do you live?" I asked the girl.

"I live miles away. At the other end of the country. My father is governor of Finston."

"Really!" I said, amazed. How crazy the world was; in what extraordinary circles events moved. Were we pawns? Was God playing some fantastic game?

"Do you know it?"

"I work down there. On the local paper." We exchanged addresses.

"I shall be there in about three weeks. Come over," she suggested.

"I will," I said, thinking of Richard, smiling, until I caught Tim's eye. He was watching us, listening, smiling oddly.

"You *will* see it out, won't you?" he said.

We shook hands, Henry suddenly relaxing on departure. "Thank you," he said. "I will write to you. You must get a copy of my book when it is published. It is being done by the Axle Press."

"We'll expect complimentary copies," I said.

His smile vanished—offended that we should even think of being given a copy—expecting us to queue for copies. He was dead serious about himself. "It's a specialised book," he said. "It will only be done in a limited edition."

"I didn't mean I wanted a complimentary copy," I had to tell him. "I was just talking."

The red car bumped off, a darker colour in the darkening light.

"How very strange," I said. "I can't get away from Richard."

"Do you want to?" Tim said.

"I don't know."

We got back to the house, melting again into the atmosphere of people and talk. I was utterly absorbed on occasions like that, forgetting myself completely.

"You must come and visit me in London," Sir Nathan said as turning about, we came next to each other. "I will give you a lesson in criticism."

"Coincidence, is there such a thing?"

"No," Sir Nathan replied. "We call it that because we cannot understand."

"We can't understand," I echoed. "but why can't we?"

"It doesn't matter," he said. "It's not important for us to understand. It's better that we shouldn't. Stops us getting too conceited."

"Do you find you have to change in the evenings at dinners and things?" Mrs. Johnson was saying across

the room to me, and I went over to her, whilst Sir Nathan moved to talk to someone else.

"What time's your train?" Tim asked. "I'll take you to the station."

The station was nothing but a place where things ended and things began for me. I had started my life, my own life, by buying a ticket to London. Each time I bought a ticket that hard green bit of paper registered itself in my mind as a point, a rung in a ladder.

"Eliot measures out his life in coffee spoons; I measure out mine in train tickets," I said.

"Don't measure too much at a time," he said. "And write to me, because I am going to play an important part in your life."

"Everyone does. Everyone must. People must play an important part in my life—people I know. If they don't I don't like them—I get bored." I thought of people, of Philip, Hugh, John Tim, Diana, my parents, Richard, now Sir Nathan, and Henry and the girl, Peggy. When I thought of people these ones stuck up in my mind. They were the important ones to my life as it was. All the other people I knew or had known were sunk in an anonymous crowd of heads, and I could see them only as vague shapes, hear them as vague voices, in my mind.

"They stick up in your mind when you think of them," I said. "You stick up, Tim."

"You always see me through smoke—you don't see me clearly," Tim said, and the train came in. Charging in, assertive as an express, it stirred the platform with a piercing squeal, summoning passengers, and porters, who rose from the gloom of benches and waiting rooms, hoisting bags, climbing into compartments, murmuring words of goodbye.

"It's twelve o'clock," said Tim. "You should get quite

a bit of sleep." And almost immediately, I slept, curled up in a corner, my head resting on the bit of arm by the window, the train talking to my sleepy thoughts, repeating phrases again and again so that I slept, soothed by repetition.

"It's all repetition," I cried, tired by the same events occurring again and again. Tired of reporting similar episodes in a similar manner.

"I want something to move," I said. "Why, because the world goes round, must we go with it?"

"Why not go with it? It's a big circle," said Philip.

"Something different for you today," said the chief reporter. "You ride don't you?"

"Yes," I answered mystified, and that afternoon I found myself being introduced to a group of Australians who were riding their way around the country, singing and rodeo-ing to pay their expenses. They were to be in our district for a fortnight.

"Don't know what's got into the editor," the chief reporter had said, "but he wants a feature. A daily piece, so let us have it by nine every evening and we will rewrite it for the evening paper." He had given me twenty pounds. "That should be enough. Let us know if you want more."

I hadn't asked any more questions, preferring to see what happened, expecting nothing. I was given a rucksack, and into this I put two pencils and a large wad of paper. That afternoon I also met my horse.

"I don't really know what to do," I said to Hugh, as he watched me mounting, to try the animal out. "I've never done a series like this before."

"You'd better write something now," he told me. "Introduce the group—and your horse."

I kicked the horse into a canter, wanting to get the feel of it; the group of five men and three girls stood by the gate of the small paddock watching. I sat into my saddle, letting myself rock backwards and forwards. The horse was keen, well groomed, and well-schooled. He arched his neck, his ears stiffly forward, his chestnut mane blowing delicately away from his neck. We look well together I thought, aware of the group watching me, and of Hugh, by the gate. I pushed my heels back to kick him again, so that we could have a final gallop, and at that moment he bucked. I could see his head going down, and as I pulled my hands back to get his head up I found myself over his ears, and I saw the ground, his legs, and under his belly I saw the Australians laughing, and Hugh coming towards me. I landed gently, sitting, still holding the reins.

"Wonderful," Hugh said. "Wonderful. Do it again."

"His name is Honeymoon," said one of the Australians. "He often does that." Honeymoon had been lent to one of the Australian girls who had left the party. He nibbled at the grass, swishing his tail languidly. "You brute," I whispered to him.

"I hear you fell off your horse," the night editor said to me, as I left the office that evening.

"Did you?" Philip, apparently engrossed in criticising some local play, looked up. "Are you off tomorrow?"

"Yes, at dawn."

"Well, wait now. I want to have some coffee with you."

Philip acted on impulses. Only his theatre life was organized. Months in advance he would know what play he was going to see and when. But apart from that he thought, moved, and spoke on impulse.

"And what impulse made you want to have coffee

with me?" I said, as we squeezed into the closing door of the cafe.

"You're always just going away. Or else busy philosophizing with Hugh, or writing to that lunatic convict. And if you fall off as easily as you apparently do, I think it's a good idea to have a goodbye coffee together."

"You make me feel as if I'm going off on an Arctic exploration trip," I said, unconsciously recalling Richard's expedition.

"You always give the impression that that's what you are doing," Philip replied. "You don't seem a permanent fixture."

And I did indeed feel like a fly on the end of a long line of gut, blowing about in the wind over a river, expecting at any minute to land, to be swallowed up by something, yet sensing all the time that I was tied to the end of the rod, and no matter how much I blew, I would always wind up there.

"The rod is held by Richard," I said, concluding the thought aloud.

"But you seem alone. Anyone's meat," Philip said, looking at me, but not listening to me. "You mustn't give yourself away too easily," he went on.

"You've been reading too many plays," I said uneasily, uncomfortable under his inhuman sort of stare.

"You go about with so many men," he said. "Hugh, John, this man Tim, and heaven only knows who else, treating them all as if they were your lovers, and yet in a way quite remote."

"Well, really! I work with them ; I like them ; what do you expect me to do?"

"Are you a virgin?" Philip asked. I wanted to feel indignant; I wanted to be evasive, clever or rude. I was too young to be anything but honest.

"Yes," I said. "Of course." Curiously embarrassed, I blushed.

"Good," said Philip.

He paid for the coffee and walked up the hill with me to my digs. From the top of the hill we could see the sea. A few people were giving their dogs a walk before going to bed; they walked them along the sea front, stopping to lean on the railings, watching the waves splashing, nothing to us but anonymous shapes.

"In a way," Philip said, "you are so vulnerable. You are so terribly responsive to affection that it's difficult not to take advantage of you. You may think of yourself, you may even be, a tough reporter, but you aren't yet a tough woman."

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked.

"I just felt like telling you. People in the office have been saying you're any man's girl. You don't mind me telling you, do you?"

"No. I just think it's ridiculous. I suppose it's because I'm the only female in the office who comes from somewhere no one knows about—malicious."

"It's a compliment."

We parted at the end of my street, which ran along the top of the hill, one row behind the houses which looked onto the sea.

"Goodbye, Philip. Thank you for the coffee. Thank you for talking." His huge form was swinging away down the hill.

"Have a good trip," he shouted up the street, his voice loud enough to make other stray pedestrians turn and look at him.

I walked along the street thinking about Philip and what he had said.

"Can you tell me the way to Albert Square?" a shabby

looking man came across the street towards me.

"I think it's behind you," I said. "Turn round, and it's the third on the right."

I moved, he side-stepped in front of me.

"I didn't really want to know. Will you come and have a drink with me?"

"It's too late," I said.

"Well, let me come up to your room."

"My husband would be furious," I said.

"Would he?" he looked at me disbelievingly.

"Anyway, I'm not the sort of person you want," I said, "You'll find plenty on the sea front." I dodged him, but he followed me along the street. "Goodnight," I said, turning into my gate.

"Won't you change your mind?" he asked pleading.

"Go back to your wife," I said, hating his sort of man. But he stood at the gate watching me fumble with the key, and then push the door open quickly. As I shut the door I heard him walk quickly away. The time was half past eleven. "He's still got time to get some woman," I thought, disgusted, yet intrigued. "How any woman could want to sleep with him though," I wondered as I climbed into bed. "So much more comfortable alone anyway."

The sun rose half an hour before me, and was only just beginning to dry the dew from the grass as I arrived at the stable on the outskirts of the town.

"Here's the Press!" shouted an Australian, all dressed up as a rodeo-ing cowboy, and before the sky was properly awake, whilst clouds still hung like early morning grey patches and the air quivered between coolness and heat, we trotted off, cutting across the moors, rousing grazing sheep and cattle, exciting wild ponies, a

strange group—gaudily dressed, but naturally simple.

"I love your moors," said one of the girls. "In Australia we have miles and miles of land, and it may look like this, but it doesn't seem like this." We let our horses canter for a bit, indulging in the luxury of the wind on our faces.

"Where are we going first?" I called to the girl.

"Don't you know? Good heavens, I thought the Press always knew everything."

"Not this particular branch," I said. "I like to come across everything unexpectedly. Then I can write my immediate reaction. Un-premeditated!"

"Then I won't tell you," laughed the girl, and I didn't care. I ignored my professional capacity, enjoying the ride, knowing that anything worth writing about would remain clear in my mind when I came to write up my daily report. They were a happy group, riding by map, which passed from hand to hand, and occasionally we would stop, letting the horses crop grass whilst we argued over the route. My sense of direction had gone; voluntarily I had dismissed from my mind any responsibility for where or how we went. I thought of myself as an absorbent tissue, passively recording incidents, character and colour.

"That must be it," I heard one of the men say, his voice carrying down the hill from where he had stopped his horse at the summit. "Look."

"God. What a place!" replied another. "We'll liven it up a bit."

They turned round and waved to us to join them. We trotted up the hill, our horses puffing. Honeymoon was the least fit, and so I let him go more slowly. Slowly we, Honeymoon and I, came up behind the other eight as they stood lined up along the top of the hill. "You are

all like some glorious Technicolor," I said.

"What?"

"A film," I said, reaching the top of the hill, arriving at the climax of a thought, for there, a mile away across the moors stood the prison, stolid, yet almost romantic in the autumn sun.

"Our first stop!"

"Not the prison? Surely not the prison?" I said, caught unawares, unprepared for the shock that I had received on suddenly seeing the prison. "I had no idea we were coming here first." I had imagined other villages, but I had not suspected this. It must have been almost impossible not to know where we were going, yet I had not known. I had not tried to know; the moors stretching and dipping had given me no hint of direction because I had not sought one. Riding along passively with the future only a blank in my mind, I was abruptly arrested. The prison straddled across my mind. It stopped further thinking. In itself it filled all space in my thoughts.

"Are you performing for the prisoners?" I asked.

"Yes. This afternoon. It should be quite a good article for you," said one of the men. "We wrote to the Governor and he thought it was an excellent idea. Their last entertainment, he said, was boxing by some professional—he took on some convicts as well as the prison chaplain."

"I remember that," I said. "We had an article about it." But I was wondering about Richard. I hadn't seen him since he had attacked the warder. Would he be allowed to watch? Would I be able to see him? To talk to him? If I did, what could I say? Would I tie Honey-moon up? At once I was trying to foresee the event, and to place in my mind the scene; to set the stage for

the action. To visualize myself, to visualize the prisoners, and to see Richard. But would I see him? Would I find him—would he look like all the others? I was suddenly tied up with Richard again, involved and responsible for what I might do and what I might say. We rode towards the prison with two hours to spare in which to rest the horses and ourselves.

"We'll stop just below the prison," suggested somebody.

"Why not ride into the village?" I said. "There's a few shops and a trough for the horses."

And we would be close to the prison. Close to Richard—there was a possibility of seeing him. He might walk up the street. He might come out of the warders' hostel; he might, he might, he might. Any possibility. Stop! Stop! I told myself. What's the use? I asked myself, remembering his mother, "Even we have given him up," she had said. "And we are his parents." "He has broken our hearts," his father had said. "Don't let him break yours." But my heart wasn't broken. It wasn't even cracked. It was full, it was Richard's.

"Other people don't know," I told myself. "Others CAN give up. I can't," and I dismissed his parents, I dismissed warnings and advice. Indulge, indulge, urged my senses, and I indulged in the frightening wonder of possibility.

Honeymoon shook his head, stamping. I had stopped by the prison gates, the others had ridden on down the hill to the water trough.

"Morning," said a warden. "Press not participating?"

"No, just watching. Are all the prisoners coming?"

"Most of 'em. Not the very bad ones or the newest arrivals of course."

Richard would be there. Very bad could not apply to him.

"You haven't been here for some time."

Some time—the weeks stretched back and back to my last visit, and a pile of experience obscured my view; France, Tim, Yorkshire, Philip, and underneath them all Richard, crying to be seen, demanding to be remembered, desiring to be loved, and on my left stone walls stretched up, screaming in greyness "Keep out," and my heart cried back, "No, no, I must come in."

"Come in now," said the warden. "The football field is through here. We've got a rail up for the horses."

"Come in now," I called to the others. "There's a rail up." Honeymoon threw his legs out, trotting widely down the little street, before I could slow him down; he whisked his hooves along the little road, half trotting, half cantering, so that I pulled him too fiercely to make him stop and his front legs skidded forward, and we slid up to the others, in a peculiar sitting position.

"You must join us—you'll be a good rodeo couple—you and Honeymoon."

"Come in to the prison," I said, wanting only to get in myself. "There's a rail up for the horses," I repeated.

"In the prison?"

"The football ground is through the main gates. There's a wall around it," I explained.

"Must have a drink first," they said, lifting glasses, tidying up, playing with lassoes, joking, young and happy, seeing England in the way they wanted. "Don't ever hurry into prison," they warned me, and I tried to think of the phrases I would use in my article to capture their mood.

"I must go," I said. "I want to see various people, ask some questions." I wrote in my notebook "First

stop Finston Prison football ground 2.30 p.m." and I drew over the two-thirty, enjoying the curve of the two, and the circle of the o. "Yes, I must go," I said, wondering why I must go, but knowing all the same that I must.

"Well, go," said one of the Australians, strapping his boot. "Go, Joan. Prepare the convicts for our astonishing and skilled performance."

"I haven't seen it yet," I said, mounting Honeymoon, who stood like a rock.

"That shouldn't worry you."

"It doesn't," I said, riding off, up to the prison again, noticing the crowd of Finston children around the group, and the shopkeepers at their doors.

"Coming?" I asked one of them.

"Yes," she said, fat and smiling. "Might as well shut up shop this afternoon. It's going to rain tomorrow so they say," she added irrelevantly.

"Better lead the horse," the warder at the gate said, and I dismounted, walking through the gates, followed by Honeymoon, holding him tightly, because he was shivering at the high walls with sudden holes, the noise of voices shouting orders, the sudden emergence of a line of men. I led him along the main prison path, waiting to meet Richard, dreading the meeting, conscious that I shouldn't be in the place as a person, but as a notebook—an inspired notebook—and then as I came to the football ground, a large patch of dull green ground, a man, tall and sallow, came up to me.

"Are you one of the performers?" he asked. He was well dressed, with a strong sort of face. "I'm the Governor," he explained.

"No," I told him. "I'm from the paper."

"Ah yes. Your editor rang through this morning to

say you would be coming. He had forgotten to do it before. We're pleased to have you. Would you like to tie up the horse?"

"I met your daughter up in Yorkshire," I said, leaving Honeymoon tied to a long rail in the corner.

"Ah yes. I didn't want her to go up there—nothing much I could do about it."

"She was enjoying herself."

"Oh. She always does that."

There were stands all the way round. They were built out from the outer prison walls and were lifted well off ground level. If a prisoner wanted to escape he would have a drop of ten foot and then the far higher wall surrounding the ground itself to scale.

"They seldom escape from here," the governor explained. There was a main gate from the football ground to the moors. On the far side of this a dozen or so wild ponies were enclosed.

"I believe these Australians are pretty good," the Governor said. "They've got themselves quite a reputation."

"They're a nice lot of people," I said. "This evening we go down to the hotel, and they sing; literally for their supper; and for their horses'."

The convicts were filing into the stands through doors which led straight from the prison. I tried not to look at them. Warders shouted to them, telling them where to go. I was conscious of a grey shuffle all around. Then the Australians came riding in, mounting their horses as they came to the ground, galloping round yipping, and swinging their ropes. The wild ponies panicked in their pen, whirling round and round on each other whinnying, and Honeymoon, jerking up

his head quickly, broke my knot and trotted quickly towards the entrance. I ran to stop him.

"Whoa!" I shouted, "Honeymoon!" The convicts still filed in, and Honeymoon pranced on, his head high, his feet lifted up daintily, excited by the noise, and the atmosphere. I reached the entrance after Honeymoon, who was already trotting down between the two high walls of the two prison wings. A warder stood in the way, his hands out, and Honeymoon, already slowing up, stopped.

"Thank you," I called.

"Joan!" And I turned to look straight at Richard sitting near the entrance, looking down to me, in the same uniform as all the others, but as apart from them as a red flower would be among a lot of yellow ones. With no hesitation I looked at him. Not for a moment did my eyes fumble; and his face was fine, and sensitive—but I was only consciously aware of his smile, his delight, and his voice. He looked more like his mother than his father I thought. I trembled, because for an instant I felt that we were utterly alone together. I felt his presence beside me, and it wasn't until Honeymoon pushed me in the back with his nostril that I noticed with a start that I was standing; that I was holding the reins of a horse; that I was dressed; that there were people all around; that in the ring the Australians were riding the wild ponies, being bucked off, and then lassoing the free pony as it galloped about in utter confusion. Confusion bucked around my mind. Richard seemed so close to me that I expected him to put his hand on my shoulder, yet he was yards away. "I must write something good," I thought, hearing the yells of the onlookers, noticing the fat shopwoman in front of me jumping up and down; watching the riders

swinging round, falling off and jumping up; noticing their own horses well trained, digging their toes in as a rope tightened on a wild pony; laughing when someone lassoed one of the group because everyone else laughed; and forcibly preventing myself from turning round to look at Richard. "Of course I love him, why did I doubt," I said, and turned round. "You look well," he called to me through the noise, through the colour, and I saw a warder move up to stop him talking. His hair was cropped short. It had grown long before he was due to be released. I resented its shortness.

"All right there?" said the Governor, coming up for a moment.

"I wonder if I could talk to one of the prisoners afterwards," I asked.

"To get their side of the rodeo—good idea."

"Well, yes, in a way. But I wanted to talk to Richard Johnson—you see I know his parents—I used to visit him before he attacked the warder."

"Officially, no."

He called to a warder. "Our reporter here would like to see Richard Johnson afterwards for a few minutes," and then to me:

"You'd better go up to the visiting room. A warder will take you."

"Thank you very much," I said, surprised by success.

"You must come and see us when my daughter's home," he said, walking off.

When I turned to look up at Richard he was watching the show, faintly smiling. He looked absorbed, and I thought that he had forgotten me.

The eight Australians rode their horses into the centre of the ground and lining up, the girls in the centre, lifted their 'sombreros'; as they replaced them

the prisoners began to file away, back into the thickness of the walls.

"There go your cousins," I said to one of the Australians who came up to me. "Your great, great grandfather was probably a terrific convict."

I thought of Richard and suddenly my head ached so that pain throbbed behind my eyes and then jumped up and down around my forehead.

"What's the matter?" the Australian asked.

"I've got to see someone. Could you take Honey-moon?"

"Yes. We're going down to get some tea and water the horses. Join us."

Frowning with pain I walked to the prison door, aware of nothing, concentrating on the path, my stomach hollow. "What's the matter?" I asked myself, but I couldn't know, I couldn't even try. With relief I saw the square arch of the doorway, and I turned into it, my eyes relaxing from the strain of the sun.

"What's the matter, Miss?" asked a warder, whom I knew.

"I don't know," I said. "Suddenly a terrific pain seemed to come into my head."

"Well, the sun isn't very strong. Sit down for a bit."

"No. I've come to see Richard Johnson. Number 6983."

"Oh, you can't see him today, Miss, I'm afraid."

"Can't see him?" Weakly I tried to stop the tears from pouring into my eyes, but they came, and my lips spluttered. "The Governor said I could," I said, like a child. I felt as if my whole face was trembling, and my throat was blocked by tears. "What's the matter?" I asked myself again, and only the fear of disappoint-

ment answered me in the voice of the warder. "Oh you can't see him today."

"Wait here. I'll go and find out." I sat on a wooden bench which was in the middle of a longish room. At the end was the visitors' book resting on a tall counter. Wire netting and bars stretched across the one window which let in little light, looking as it did only onto another wall. Sitting down helped me. 'I must stop this,' I told myself, looking at my hand trembling, trying to still my mouth which jerked miserably up and down, trying to control the hiccupping which resulted from sudden silent sobs.

I took my notebook from my pocket, concentrating hard. 'I will write my report,' I ordered myself. I put my pencil point firmly on the page, below the words 'First stop Finston Prison football ground. 2.30 p.m.' I waited for words to come, the notebook resting on my knee, my whole body still from the effort, the pain in my head dulled. But I found myself listening for the warder's steps, and my hand wrote Richard Johnson, 6983, bringing the pencil back to go over the numbers again. But I was not crying or trembling. I was waiting. "I must be nervous," I thought. I hadn't known I could get into such a state. "Because I love Richard," I told myself, and tried to feel love, but I felt only fright and dull pain. "Is this love?" I asked myself, feeling sick and tired. "Is it the end of love?" the question flickered through my mind, but I squashed it, telling myself, "I love him, I love him."

"All right, Miss," said the warder, and I jumped, startled because somehow I hadn't heard his boots.

As I followed another warder along the corridors and up steps I noticed the difference between that day and Sundays. The corridors were no longer empty and

silent. Warders walked about, going into cells, keys jangled. I could hear the voices of convicts talking; rough and vulgar, quieter monosyllables, aggressive sniffs and coughs. It was no time of year inside the prison. It might have been summer or winter. Sunny or rainy.

"In the cells they get the sun," the warder told me, and I kept to one side to allow three convicts followed closely by a warder to pass.

Devoid almost of thought or feeling I sat at the table, my hands in front of me, my eyes registering brownness and greyness. My forefinger traced a bit of dark grain in the table, it wandered unevenly along and then suddenly came to a point, doubling back—a hare chased by a greyhound, a shot ricocheting—

"At last!" Richard said, sitting down. "What's the matter?"

"Richard. We mustn't waste time. I don't know what I feel. I don't know what I want. At moments I think I love you. But I don't know you. I don't know you at all." I was whispering—it was an effort to speak but I made myself. I had to have a positive feeling. I had to sort myself out. I talked quietly so that the warders at the door wouldn't hear, but they were only watching us, they weren't listening. I wasn't looking at Richard. I was watching the dark line of grain. I was afraid to look at him.

"Joan." His voice was deep; it pulled my gaze from the table, it made my eyes look into his. Again I sobbed. I couldn't help it, I was overwhelmed by desire, a simple desire just to touch him, just to kiss him once, and my eyes couldn't escape his gaze. His eyes seemed to shine deep, deep into his mind, reflecting his feelings, translating his words into a look.

"Don't," I begged. "Don't please."

"You must know," he said. "It's all so unnatural, so strange, this relationship. It's easier for me in a way. I have no one to influence me, no other people to make me query my thoughts." He released me, and my eyes went to his hands. He had large hands, and long fingers; but his fingers were not thin. They were strong fingers, the joints were strong, his hands reflected his strength, echoed the strength of his whole being which overpowered me, which made me feel what he wished me to feel.

"We belong," he said, and willingly I reiterated, "We belong." But I knew something of my weakness. "How long?" I asked. "How long must we wait?"

"Not long," he said.

"How many years?" I asked.

"Time doesn't pass in years, it passes in actions, in experience." And I remembered how quickly my last year had passed, how slow the rest of my life had been.

"We will ride," he said, breaking the mood, his eyebrows straight above his eyes, which smiled gently. "I didn't know you could ride."

"The horse is Honeymoon—his name," I said, "and Oh, yes! I must record the reactions of an onlooker. Did you enjoy the rodeo?" It was no longer necessary to seek reassurance. I knew again that I loved Richard. I knew surely.

"I liked the rodeo. I like any entertainment we have here, any lecture. I liked that particularly. I liked the movement, I liked the horses, I liked the incongruity of the wild west in the middle of a prison, in the middle of the moor."

"Be simple," I said. "I want a simple reaction. My article will be simple."

"That is the most simple answer I can give. Quite simply I liked it. Without any complexes. I enjoyed it. I liked the girls. I think they all rode well. I always like to see people falling off. Everybody does, as long as they don't hurt themselves. I liked the colour and the costume. Isn't that enough? I can't go on and on. Although we are convicts we are the same as anybody else when it comes to watching something like that. Perhaps we enjoy it a little more. I suppose some of us may be a little cynical—but truly I think that's rare."

"Thank you," I said, and I reached for my notebook because I thought it might amuse him to see it. As I put my hand to my pocket, a warder stepped forward.

"Sorry, Miss. Hands on the table."

"What were you reaching for, a file?" Richard asked.

"My notebook. But I don't need it. I remember everything you say."

I remembered everything he had said. I remembered every expression on his face. The sun was melting away as I came out of the prison. How odd to be feeling as I have been feeling, I thought, flooded with consciousness of Richard. "But I still don't know him," I told myself, disbelieving it all the same. "I don't even know how long I must wait," I remembered, but without worry. I could wait indefinitely, I thought, going from the gates, smiling at the warder there.

"Good evening," he said. "It was a good show." I walked down the street, and the daylight made me feel strange; all the ordinary things that happen in a small street made me feel strange. I thought I was unnatural to have felt as I had been feeling—love seemed something incongruous in that little street, and emotion redundant.

"They've gone on," said a man, holding Honeymoon.

Alone I rode from the village following the little road along which I had driven with Philip that evening ages before. To the same hotel I rode, and as I rode the sun set, leaving the sky pale, reminding me of the fat shop-woman's words. "Tomorrow it will rain." Tomorrow it will rain, I thought ; tomorrow we will get soaked, and the next day we will be dry, and then we will be wet again, if not on the next day, on some day, and all the time I will be loving Richard. I pressed my legs into Honeymoon's flanks and leaning forward stood up in the saddle as he cantered easily along the verge. The slight evening breeze laughed by me, and I laughed back aloud, holding the reins quite tightly because Honeymoon was excited by the evening, wanting to join the other horses, hungry for a feed. Holding my reins in one hand I patted his neck, high up, just behind his ear. His ears, pricked, came back for a minute, as I spoke to him. "Come on," I said, my knees tight with energy, and we galloped for a while, until we reached the point where the road sank to the hotel. I sank back into the saddle, and sensing me relax Honeymoon slowed up. "You are a wonderful horse," I whispered to him, loving the ride, and one ear came back to catch my voice, the other remaining pricked. The pale sky was darkening, and Honeymoon's hooves echoed down the hill. A high strained neigh of welcome came across from the stables of the hotel below, and Honeymoon, stretching his neck, called back, lengthening and speeding his stride.

The dining room and lounge of the little hotel were crowded when I left to telephone the office. The Australians changed into quieter clothes, the girls attractive in cocktail dresses, were singing softly songs from

'home'. They sang them well ; sincerely and gaily. They were completely unaffected.

"Copy," I said, as the telephonist from the office answered the call. I heard her switch me through with a click to the copy desk where girls would type in answer to my voice.

"Hello! Copy," a voice said. "That you, Joan? Had a good day? Good. Where are you? Right." I heard her winding the paper into the typewriter as she talked, clattering out the date and my name. I sorted out my untidy sheets of copy paper on which I had written my article.

"All Finston spent the afternoon in prison," I dictated, reading from my notes, wondering how much of the article would appear eventually.

"Is anyone in the office?" I asked, ending my story.

"I'll have a look," the girl answered, knowing that I meant Philip or Hugh or Diana.

I heard another click, transferring me to the reporters' phone.

"Hello," Hugh's voice spoke, "where are you?"

"Just the other side of Finston."

"Have you been bucked off?"

"No."

"Were you at the prison this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Johnson?"

"Yes. I spoke to him."

"Good heavens, you were lucky. Nothing at all is happening here. I had a funeral this morning, and I'm just off to get the results of a darts match. Is it nice out there? They say it's going to rain here tomorrow."

"Here too. Well, I'll ring off, there's not much to say. I'll see you in a fortnight."

"Good. Goodbye."

I could never talk on the telephone, although I loved hearing people's voices, imagining their faces. I wished I could ring Richard up—I would be able to tell him about the ride down from Finston, about the singing. Soon, I hoped, I would be able to tell him about everything. I had never wanted to tell anyone before.

The next day it was raining. The Australians were well equipped with mackintoshes, but it was rather miserable for them. We were out as early as the previous morning. The horses, hating the rain, trotted with their heads held awkwardly sideways. I had no mackintosh, but I loved the feeling of rain soaking right through me, so that my hair hung straight, and cool drops of rain ran down my face. Hooves squelched on the grass. The moors were far more silent in the rain. The wild ponies sheltered in groups under odd trees, or big rocks, and the sheep sheltered by bushes, whilst most of the cattle lay, keeping the grass dry beneath them.

"Can you rodeo in the rain?" I asked.

"We'll have to. It's awkward riding the wild ponies though. They're so slippery."

We rode towards the coast, travelling west. Beyond us we could see a hill glowing smugly under the rays of the sun.

For the rest of that week we rode; for me it was a holiday, and I found it easy to write my articles in the evenings. I was bubbling with enthusiasm and energy. I liked the Australians, I liked riding, I liked the country, and behind me I knew was the security, strange but nevertheless there, of loving and being loved by Richard. From his love I could bound about, knowing that I could and would always rebound to him.

I had been bucked off several times by Honeymoon. He bucked at unexpected moments, presumably for the sheer joy of life, and when he bucked I couldn't stop him, nor could I sit him. "As long as he sticks to the grass," I had said, "I don't mind."

We reached the coast. "The sea!" we cried, delighted with it, and we rode down a narrow path between the rocks onto the beach, and the horses felt wild with their hooves on the soft sand, and the waves coming in towards them.

"Let's gallop through the surf," shouted one of the girls, and at once we were off, uncontrolled, with a length of sand stretching in a wide curve ahead; then suddenly a paper bag fluttered from the cliff towards us. I reached up to it, turning Honeymoon after it as it skimmed along above the sand, and as I leant over to catch it, slowing Honeymoon down, I felt his head go down, and as I still stretched for the paper I felt him buck, and I had a quick glimpse of a wave breaking whitely on the sand, the other horses galloping away, and a rock, black, below me.

FEAR, fear—what is it?

"Why is it that I tremble?" I murmured, questioning myself.

"Inwardly shivering, outwardly shaking?

"Stuttering, I forget

"That when we first met

"It was you who were quaking."

I considered the words, enjoying their shape, careless of their meaning, feeling that they expressed something, unwilling to make the effort to understand.

"Inwardly shivering, outwardly shaking," I repeated, visualising trembling shapes, too vague to be of any particular form.

"Is she all right?" A voice interrupted me, clearly piercing the misty shapes, so that I saw the words written clearly in heavy black letters, 'Is she all right?'

"Of course I'm all right," I said crossly, waving my arm, dismissing the words, disliking the voice. "Go away."

"She'll be all right," said another voice, ignoring me. "You go on. The ambulance will be here shortly."

"Shaking, quaking," I murmured.

"Goodbye," said a voice. "I'll telephone."

"Don't telephone," I screamed. "Don't phone. I can't bear the ringing," and I imagined the ringing, so real it seemed that I shouted again, "Shut up, turn it off!" but as I stopped shouting I heard a voice say again:

"She'll be all right."

So I gave up trying to control those voices, which

were anyway far, far away. Probably they were nothing to do with me, so why waste valuable time on them; for time seemed very valuable. But I found I couldn't get back to my thought. I sought vainly for some clue so that I could get back to where I had been when the voice had spoken for the second time, but I fumbled hopelessly in a pit of blackness, troubled all the time by hands feeling me, lifting me, wrapping me. At last they let me alone, but then with the starting up of an engine I was again shaken; I slipped back to the point, "Shaking and quaking," I repeated, shaking and quaking as I was. As the movement continued I became afraid. "Help," I called, "Help me," and I thought I was falling and below me I saw a sharp black rock. "Help!" I screamed, throwing out my hand, and it was caught, but already I was puffing, my heart was beating with the terror I had felt falling, so I clung to the hand which was cool and strong, sobbing, afraid of my fear, lost in some chasm. "Please help me," I said, still insecure, still clinging; clinging to a rope which hung over fierce, hard shapes and my hands were giving way, the rope was trembling, my hands were sore, and I hadn't any strength. "Please, please," I sobbed, quivering all over, and a cool hand soothed my forehead and the quaking stopped, leaving only silence.

Sound again, with constant movement; whiteness and blackness flickering backwards and forwards; disturbing pain all over; words pricking my ears so that they ached; strumming noises, magnified by repetition beating in my head; gagging cloth preventing my yells; yells for release starting deep inside me, gagged before they could escape; incredible tension, with nerves quivering; jabbing points sinking into me, cruelly, ignoring my pain, making me wonder why.

"Why? Why?" I tried to shout, "do you hurt me so?" and before I could hear a reply cloddy grey clouds dimmed everything, making pain recede, thought impossible, fear dissolve.

A door clicked, making me open my eyes, but I was alone. Yet I had felt a presence. "Come back," I shouted, and my stomach twisted with my words, making me sick, but the door opened and a nurse came in.

"What's the matter?" I asked, exhausted already, accepting illness, too tired to query much. Without hearing her answer I slept again, only just feeling a movement of hands about me.

My eyes opened again onto blackness; blackness relieved only by a small blue light. Alone, fear crept back. "Richard! Richard!" I cried, wanting his arms to hold my head. "Richard," I called, until I remembered that he couldn't come, so I called for Tim, and a shape moved up to me, standing over me, talking. "Tim?" I said, "stay with me. Please don't leave, I can't bear to be left," and I knew that if he went I would be lost, and unsafe, and he answered in a soft voice, a woman's voice, but I felt him there, and I could relax, because I knew he wouldn't leave me, and again I slept. Light came, next—"Tim?" I said before opening my eyes, stretching out my hand for him, but my hand was held by someone else, because the hands were soft and small, and a voice was telling me that Tim had gone. "Gone?" I asked. "No, he won't go." So I tried to sit up to see him for myself, for I was certain that he would be in the room, but a weight on my head pushed me back, hurting.

"Lie still," said a voice.

"Let me go!" I said. "Damn you. I hate you. Let me

go." I wanted to go. All of me wanted to go. I couldn't bear to stay still any longer. "Tim! Tim!" I shouted, calling loudly so that my throat hurt, and my head hurt. But I knew I must have Tim to take me away. If Richard couldn't take me away Tim could, and my wanting revolved around them both so I felt myself shouting for Tim and Richard, till I was unable to call out loud, and could only silently pray, until something broke inside me, and I shook sobbing, every shake hurting, and I called at last for my mother, imagining that she would pick me up in her arms, soothing me, telling me it would be all right, that there was nothing to be afraid of. "Mother!" I shouted, needing someone I knew.

"She's just coming," answered a voice, softly.

"Do you promise?" I said, noticing whiteness above me. Ominously still whiteness. "Don't let it turn black," I murmured. "If she's really coming, though, it will be all right . . ." And again I slept.

Then I stood on a cliff looking out over the sea, and in the far distance was more land. From that land I heard a voice calling me. "Joan, Joan," it called, repeating my name, and I listened, not answering. "Answer me, please," it called, longingly, so I made an effort, lifting my head, calling back, and the sound of my voice calling woke me, and my mother smiled at me.

"Hello, darling," she said.

"Strawberries," I heard Philip saying hours later, far down the passage outside my room. "There's nothing wrong with them, is there?" and so I wriggled myself into a sitting position, my right side still aching and bruised, my head bandaged. Forgetting the bandage I put my hand up to tidy my hair. "Fifteen minutes," the nurse said, and Philip stalked across the room, a basketful of strawberries in one hand.

He put them down on the table beside my bed, and at once took two out and ate them. "Have one," he said.

"Sit down," I said, and he let himself slide back into the armed chair, crossing his knees lazily, crossing his hands, looking at me.

"I thought something like this would happen. How wise of me to have that coffee with you. Will you ever be whole again?"

"I hope so. When did you know?"

"The day it happened. No copy came through, and then the Australians phoned."

"I didn't know myself until three days after. It was odd. I've never been in such a peculiar, unworldly state before. Was the editor angry?"

"Worried. Cursed himself for putting you on a horse; he said you were only pretending you could ride."

"What nonsense. Of course I can ride. It was a paper bag."

"It doesn't matter now anyway. The Australians are ringing their reports through themselves. They finish tomorrow."

"Will they come and see me?"

"When do you get out?"

"Next week. My mother's going to take me home to convalesce. 'Mental strain' you know."

Philip sat silently, looking round, and I didn't bother to talk. Suddenly he got up.

"I must go now. I'll come in tomorrow if I can."

"Goodbye," I said, wondering if he had enjoyed the visit.

"She looks better than I thought she would," I heard him call to the nurse. "I'm not very good with patients; I hope I didn't tire her."

"I don't think you did," the nurse laughed. "I like him," she said to me. "He's on your paper?"

"Yes. I'll introduce him properly next time."

"I like him very much," she said, tidying up my bed.

"Have a strawberry," I said.

A huge bunch of flowers arrived the same evening. A note from Philip said he was glad I was still alive and hoped there would be some strawberries left. The editor came for a few minutes, then the chief reporter. As soon as I could write, I wrote to Richard.

"I fell off," I wrote. "The nurse says I called for you when I was delirious. I am lucky to be sane still, or perhaps you would say unlucky."

"Someone called Hugh," said the nurse, as I licked the envelope.

"Just in time," I said, "to post this letter to Richard."

"The accident hasn't knocked that nonsense out of you, I'm sorry to see," said Hugh, dropping piles of magazines onto the bed.

"Fifteen minutes," the nurse called through the door.

"Like a convict," said Hugh. He held up a copy of our paper. "Miss Reid, the *Chronicle* reporter who was badly hurt after falling off her horse Honeymoon during a tour with the Australian rodeo and singing group, is today reported to be very much better. She is expected to leave hospital within the next week."

"How nice. I might be a town councillor, or a business and professional woman," I said, having frequently written progress reports for people myself.

"Oh, we had you on the danger list the first night." Hugh showed me a bulletin underneath a photograph of me on Honeymoon with the Australians.

"I never thought I was dangerously ill. As a matter of fact it wasn't until I was better that I knew I'd been

hurt at all. I didn't think of things like that. I felt pain and fear, and saw odd objects, and shouted to people who weren't there, but it all seemed a present thing. Not the result of anything."

Getting better was an enjoyable state. I was used to the pain. I enjoyed being visited; and I could sleep as much as I liked.

"So nice sleeping without a guilty conscience for being lazy," I said.

Hugh smiled. "Lots of people have asked after you, including the mayor. I was at a dinner the other night, and he said 'Give that nice young reporter of yours my regards if you see her'."

"How nice of him. I'm glad I reported his funny stories."

"Well, you got half a crown for them." — They always went into an odd column—a chatty column—for which we all contributed paragraphs at two and six a time.

"Sometimes they ran to two paragraphs," I said. "I'm sure he read them, and laughed all over again."

"I'll post this," Hugh said, getting up to go. "Anything else you want? By the way, I like your nurse. What's her name?"

"Nurse Janet Rolt," I said. "But she's fallen for Philip."

"She's very attractive," Hugh said, emphasizing slowly the 'very.' "I think Richard Johnson would like her."

"Shut up," I said, annoyed, yet liking Hugh. "Must you go?"

"Fifteen minutes," he said. "By the way, who sent you the flowers?"

"Philip."

"Well, goodbye."

That same evening some flowers arrived for me from Hugh. I was touched, because it wasn't the sort of thing Hugh did. He did not believe in giving women presents. Unlike Philip, he treated me like an equal, keeping his 'loves' as something apart from his daily life.

"How's the patient?" said Diana. "Trust you to do something like that. No one else would have landed on a rock. Did Philip and Hugh send those flowers? Well I'll be damned. I never thought they had it in them. I'm doing film critic now ; you must come with me when you're better. I hear you saw your convict when you went to the prison. You aren't still in love with him are you?" So Diana talked, prompted only occasionally by an answer from me, and I liked it. I liked listening to her. I enjoyed her ideas, and I liked hearing the office gossip.

"That chap you met in Yorkshire," she said. "He rang up the other day. I think he may be coming to see you. He said he would be this way. I took the message. I was the duty reporter in the office at the time. He sounded nice. Is he?"

"Tim?" I remembered being surprised when my nurse, Janet, had told me I had called for Tim more than for anyone else when I was delirious. "Yes, he's very nice." But I had never considered what I thought of Tim. Richard was the only person I really considered in his absence. Tim was someone I liked to be with, but who I had not consciously missed when away from him.

"I don't know him very well," I said.

"He seemed to know you well. He seemed upset when I told him about your fall."

"Oh yes. We know each other as well as that," I

said, wondering just what *that* was—how much Tim really meant to me. Puzzled by my calling for him, whilst virtually unconscious, I now consciously began to think of him.

"When is he coming?" I asked.

"Soon," Diana replied, curious, wondering at my attitude.

"You are so casual about people," she said, leaving me alone in the small white room. Over by the window were the flowers, colourful in a colourless room. Outside the sun shone only dimly through clouds, the window was slightly open. I threw one of Philip's strawberries through it, tired of being a patient, making an impatient gesture.

"What's that?" someone said below.

"Must be one of the patients in the private ward," said a voice. They were two pedestrians walking along the street. "My wife was in there when she had a miscarriage two years back."

"Odd, letting them throw strawberries out of the window," the voice carried up, as the footsteps died away. I wanted to call out to them to come to see me.

"Well," said Tim. "May I come in?"

"Here!" said Janet. "How did you get in?"

"Walked," said Tim. "Can I see Miss Reid?"

"Oh, yes; he's fairly respectable," I said, a feeling of delight engulfing me, so that I had to smile, wanting to laugh.

"Just come and see the matron, will you?" Janet said, leaving the door slightly open.

"She's very much better," I heard her say quietly, thinking I couldn't hear. "I believe your name is Tim?"

"Yes."

"Well, she yelled and screamed for you when she

was delirious, and she hurt her head quite badly, so be quiet with her. They affect people queerly sometimes—these head injuries—”

“She’s quite sane?” Tim whispered, and I leant forward in bed to hear if I was.

“Oh yes. She’s completely normal now, but we still have to be careful, because the brain is a delicate thing.”

“So she called for me,” Tim said, and I hurried myself back into a lying position, rustling sheets, and gazing out of the window.

“You don’t look very sick,” Tim said, coming in.

“How nice of you to come. I’m so glad to see you. I knew you had rung up. I’ve been hoping you’d come soon. How long can you stay?”

“For ever,” Tim said, ignoring the chair, sitting on the bed. “Brush your hair,” he said, handing me my brush. “It’s a mess.” He held my handmirror up for me.

“I can’t brush the right side,” I said. “It hurts still.”

“Some lipstick,” he said, handing that to me. “You don’t look ill enough to be careless.”

“Powder? Where is it?” he said.

“I haven’t got any here. If you don’t like my shiny nose you must go away—only don’t.”

Tim got up, and before I realized what he was doing, he leant forward and kissed my nose.

“Seems to be the only way to get the shine off,” he said, sitting down again.

“You’ve changed,” I said. “You’re quite different. And exceedingly bossy. What are you doing down this way?”

“Following a line of telegraph poles, of course. Would you marry me if I asked you?”

"And follow lines of telegraph poles for the rest of my life?" I said, joking, embarrassed by Tim's proposal, having no idea whether I wanted to marry him or not, the thought never having crossed my mind. "Why should you ask me?"

"I have, much against my will, fallen in love with you."

"No, no. Don't do that. You can't have really, Tim. People don't do that—I'm sure they don't—exceptional cases of course—please, Tim, don't ask me. I never want to say no to you—but Richard; I think I love Richard."

"Do you want to marry Richard?"

"I hadn't quite thought of that. I hadn't reached that point."

"Does he want to marry you?"

"I don't know, I don't know. Why ask me?"

"Because I do want to marry you. You need someone to prevent you falling about as carelessly as you do. You fall in love with convicts, and off horses."

"I was thrown—I didn't fall—off Honeymoon," I said, wondering what I could say, what I should say, stalling. .

"It's nice of you to ask me." I floundered around for a suitable thing to say.

"It's not very nice of you not to say yes at once," Tim answered. "Do a lot of people come to see you?"

"My mother came down when I was really ill, and she's coming again in a few days' time. People from the office come—they all fall in love with my nurse!"

"No wonder, if you're so cold."

"Don't be mean, Tim."

But when he left I tried to think of myself marrying Tim. But Richard, what of Richard? I found myself wondering.

"I wish he would write," I said, "soon, to help me."

"A letter for you," said Janet, "with the prison stamp. Who do you know in prison?"

"Convict No. 6983," I answered, and she laughed.

As I opened the envelope, hurriedly tearing the flap, a dry daisy fell out. I took it before I knew what I was doing, quickly kissing it before putting it on the table, beside my glass and a bottle of orange squash.

"Joan, Joan, Joan, my dearest, so excited was I by seeing you that I was left in a dizzy whirl, hardly believing that I had seen you, yet knowing because your voice echoed around in my mind, and I kept dreaming that I was looking into your eyes, which you so shyly kept from me. We said nothing, but we meant such a lot. Then your note. And I swore, viciously, bitterly, brutally, because I couldn't come to you—come, as I'm sure many others have, laden with armfuls of flowers, basketfuls of luscious fruits, piles of books written by splendid people, anxious messages from worried friends.

How long you asked, and lying in bed you must still be thinking it—thinking it more than ever before—and yesterday I was suddenly afraid of me; I was suddenly afraid that you won't wait long; I was suddenly afraid of myself, and the warder said 'Three years'. Is three years too long to wait? To wait for what? What am I? What will I be? A moth-eaten convict with a bad reputation for violence. And what do you know of me? How strange this business is. What do I know of you? Yet I do know that I love you. I question myself time and time again, and still I know. I know because I have worried madly about you since your note. I can't

imagine you stuck in bed, when to me you are someone terribly alive and vital, and vivacious. I can't imagine you being anything but impetuous. But I have to pray that you won't impetuously go off with someone else whilst waiting for me. Yet what right have I to ask you not to? But I feel uneasy. Because I love you I think other people must love you. You must write to me. You must assure me that you love me—you have never told me that you love me—you have implied it by your looks, by your actions, but you haven't said so to me, anyway. And all my world knows. My prison world. My letters are naturally censored, and yet, so proud am I of loving you that I want the lot of them to see you, and to see me and to say 'they are in love'. I long to be out. I pray that I may become a decent human once more; that you have purged me of my depravity, and so pure do I feel when I think of you, that I am sure you have. How can I speak these things to you? It is impossible—I must be free to talk to you like this, free in the moonlight, or in the peace of the country—I want to be romantic with you. I want to be soft and sentimental. I don't want to be with you sordidly in any way. I want to be with you normally, decently. I want you to be my wife, to bear my children—I write this so sincerely, Joan, darling, that you must feel, through this poor medium, that I mean what I say. You must understand that I cannot say this sort of thing in the fifteen minutes we have, when we sit awkwardly, opposite, so close and yet miles and miles apart.

When I saw you at the rodeo I felt that we were the only people there. For a minute I thought that I only had to reach out my arm to touch you. So much

did I long to touch you that I had to look away. You asked me, what did I think of the rodeo. Well, I didn't. How could I? How could you?

Please, and I have to beg because I am at your mercy, write to me and tell me something of your life; who are your friends? And above all, darling, tell me that you love me. Not like me very much, not that you are fond of me, not that you love me sometimes, or in a pitying way. No, I couldn't bear to be told that. I want to be loved, wholly, completely, unreservedly. It is illogical that you should. It is incomprehensible that you should. It is fantastic that you should. But you must, you do; I'm sure you do. Be sure, too, darling.

And now I must stop. Not because I want to stop; I want to go on and on. I feel uneasy today about you. Why I don't know. I have given up trying to know since I have loved you. No, I have to stop because I have run out of my ration of notepaper! We are allowed so many sheets a letter, and every inch of mine, my darling, is spent in loving you. I am all yours, so write to me soon, Richard."

"Richard, Richard, I do love you, I do, I do, I do," I whispered fiercely to the daisy, and to the letter, tears, sentimental tears, streaming from eyes.

I read the letter again and again, responding absolutely to Richard's plea, loving him tremendously, sitting up in bed, thinking of him so hard that I was sure he would know. Yet I couldn't write to him until Tim came. He must have known about Tim, have felt something, I thought. Why else should he have been uneasy? And I decided to plead with the Governor to let Richard out sooner, to beg and beg. Anything, I thought.

"Hello!" said Tim. "Why, Joan, you're crying."

"No. It's a letter. I cry easily—my head."

"I've brought some flowers."

"Thank you, they are lovely. Tim, what do you do—I mean, besides telegraph poles?"

"I thought you might ask me that some time. It was rather nice of you not even to wonder! You amuse me, I love you. I'm an inventor. I work for a firm which designs electrical appliances, invents them, puts them into practice; I find my job fascinating. It's almost my hobby as well. I'm on a job down here, because we are designing an electrical canning apparatus for sardines."

"Sounds very peculiar, Tim. Tim, don't love me; I can't love you. For hundreds of reasons I can't marry you. One of them is that my father once told me that I must marry someone who owned a lot of land. Someone who had a grouse shoot, so that we could invite him to come grouse shooting."

"And you always do what your father tells you? Joan, I'm quite serious, you know."

"Tim, I love Richard. Even if I never marry *him*, I couldn't marry you loving him."

"Has he ever made love to you?"

"How could he? But he has written to me. As much as love can be made by letter, he has made it. As love can be conveyed by a pen, he has conveyed it, and I do love him, Tim, really I do."

"He always could write well." Tim walked to the window, passing his hand through his fair hair, tall, with two worried lines in between his eyebrows stretching up from the top of his nose towards his forehead. "So you are going to sit back until you become a very old maid, and Richard is a grizzled old convict—for I have no doubt that he will be that—just saying you

love him, denying yourself the pleasures that most normal women desire?"

"I don't know. I just don't know at all what I shall do."

"So you reject me. I am to go away. I shan't see you again for we can't ever be 'just friends'. I must say 'Goodbye' and go, waft out of your life, and leave you sitting about outside the prison, until someone more sensible than me grabs you, and forces you to the altar, or rapes you, or something like that, and beats the living daylights out of you whenever you mention that blasted Richard's name."

Tim stood, his back to the window, working himself into a rage, and again I was swayed towards him in affection. 'So vulnerable' Philip had said, and I felt so vulnerable, at that moment. "I don't want you to go, Tim. I don't see why we can't be friends. I don't want to marry anyone just yet, can't you see?" I sobbed again, loving Richard, loving Tim. "I could love the whole world if the whole world loved me," I cried, aware of my inconstancy, unable to deny myself Tim's friendship, wanting his love.

"I won't go," Tim said, coming up to me, holding my hand. "I won't go yet. I will wait until you are better. I couldn't go even if I wanted to, not without knowing certainly that you don't love me. I don't believe you know yourself. I'm sure you don't. You need to be told."

"Go if you want to," I said, suddenly changing my mind. "I'm sure I love Richard, quite sure."

"I'm going now anyway," Tim said. "I'll write to you soon—when you are up, working again. Goodbye." He went to the door, turning there. "Goodbye," he said.

"Tim, Tim," I said silently, hurt because I had hurt him. "Understand, please understand," but his steps

receded, and I hadn't the will to cry out. I cried silently, mixed up, not knowing at all what I wanted, unable to translate my feelings into solid words like love, marriage, fidelity, friendship. I cried, aching from sadness, insufficiency, to myself and to anybody else. "I'm not a person yet," I said. "I need time," but time was passing and I seemed to stay the same.

"Have I changed?" I asked my parents, resting at home, lazing about, already restless to be moving.

"We don't know you," they said in answer. "You have taken yourself away completely—you have left nothing."

"But love," I said.

"Do you love?" they asked. "You show nothing."

"Yes, I do," I said, knowing that I kept my feelings tightly enclosed inside me, not sure enough of them to let them out.

After this I wrote to Richard, allowing my feelings for him to escape—expressing my love, doubting my constancy, confirming his power over me; confirming my belief in him; permitting my longing to be with him to seep into my letter. I told him about Tim—not about his proposal—but that I had met him, that he had been to see me in hospital. "I have never written like this to anyone," I concluded. "I have never wanted to, I have never been able to express my real feelings. Whoever I am with, and whatever my feelings for them are, I am always conscious of you inside me, and it is strangely comforting. I do love you Richard. I have said it now, and I feel very dependent on you."

As I posted the letter I had the sensation of posting a bit of myself—I almost felt as if I was sacrificing myself.

"You are going back?" my father asked.

"Yes."

"You won't stay there. You will move on."

"I must stay. You don't believe me, but I love Richard."

"You'd better stop loving him pretty quickly," my mother said.

"Grow up," said my father.

"I have," I replied, wandering down for a last look at the river—"You can never go back," I murmured, picturing one bit of water flowing on, and on, missing some delightful little splash over a waterfall, noticing it too late, having to flow on. I scooped up a bit of water in a jam jar and took it a little way upstream—"unless you are taken back," I continued.

"In a jam jar," said my father. "I can't help you," he said, "you've got to find out for yourself about love. You must sort out your own values. I can only make you promise to come home if you are terribly unhappy. I can only see that you will be terribly unhappy."

"I won't," I argued. "I will be happy, I will."

"I hope you will," my father said.

"Don't always wait until you fall off to come home, darling," my mother said.

And once more I left home, half sadly, half gladly, both fascinated by, and afraid of, the future.

Philip met me on my arrival.

"How are you?" I said. "How's life?"

"Life is good," he replied. "So is Janet."

"Oh, Philip! We have been doomed to be present at the beginning of each other's romances—almost the instigators of them!"

"I thought the knock on the head would have cured you of that. Janet said something about someone called

Tim. What an inconstant person you are! What a good character for my play!"

To be sitting beside Philip again was a pleasant renewal of what seemed a past life. Big, but now personal, now friendly, Philip was an essential to that life.

"You start work tomorrow. Tonight you are coming to a party Hugh and I are giving for you. We have decided that you should stick to funerals and tea parties. We've all missed you about the office."

"I won't stick to anything; I'd rather die than be stagnant."

"We don't really care what you want." Philip said. "You look well."

"Have you looked at me?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Of course we're pleased to see you," Hugh said at the party.

"Of course you will come to tea on Sunday," said Mr. Thomas.

"Of course," they all said, and I willingly abandoned any attempt to direct my life, or my actions.

"Of course," I said, "I will do what you expect."

"A funeral to start you off," said the chief reporter, smiling. Philip, coming into the office, his hat perched on his head, a brown bow tie, a new addition to his clothing, laughed. "I told you so," he said, not stopping to talk to me, apparently seeing me no more.

At the end of the week I charged up five shillings for wear and tear of black clothes. "And when I die," I said, "I shall charge 1s. 6d. for wear and tear of my shroud."

"Come to lunch," said Peggy, the Governor's daughter, over the phone. "I'm just back."

"I'm going to lunch," I told Hugh, "with the prison Governor."

"Try not to fall in love with him," Hugh said.

Peggy met me at the bus stop in her little red car.

"It's cold," she said. "But let's have the top down anyway."

"Icy." I laughed, the cold darting into me, clouds blowing about the sky, short moorland grass struggling to escape from the ground and blow in the wind, ponies backing into the wind, sheep huddling into the valleys, trees giving up their leaves at the wind's demand, the little car rattling straight into it.

"Too cold?" Peggy asked.

"No," I said, scarcely able to open my mouth. "Just right."

The Governor's house was outside Finston.

"I want to ask your father about a prisoner. Will he mind?"

"No. He doesn't mind anything. A wonderul man. Is it about Richard Johnson?"

"Yes."

"The chap who hit a warder the day before he was due to be released?"

"Yes."

"He's an odd man. My father likes him. He was really upset when he did that. He had thought he was cured—really better. They got on well together. Johnson was so upset afterwards. My father says educated criminals are far the most pathetic—of that sort anyway—not forgers and embezzlers, of course—but people who do things violently in sudden sort of blackouts and then regret it. But there's nothing you can do about it. You can't really treat them differently."

"Joan wants to talk to you," Peggy said to her father.

"Yes," he said. "About Richard Johnson, I expect."

"How did you know?"

"Richard Johnson has spoken to me. We are quite good friends, in so far as we can be in our positions. Since you saw him at that rodeo he has been very keyed up. He has been unsettled and restless. I went to see him and suggested he talked to me, and he told me that he loved you; he even begged me to reduce his sentence. He swore that for once he felt fully confident in himself—fully in control. He was very worked up and very emotional. In prison, if a prisoner has any sort of emotional crisis it tends to be magnified by the concentration with which the prisoner regards it. He said it wasn't only for him but for you that he wanted his release."

"What did you say?" Hoping against all knowledge, that the impossible might have happened, I stared at a picture on the wall—it was a picture of a small girl holding a dog in her arms—waiting for him to speak, though I was certain that I didn't want to hear what he was going to say.

"It's not for me to reduce sentences," he said, kindly, not bothering to say more.

"Can't you ever?"

"Do you love him?"

"Yes. I will wait, but must I? Isn't there anything? Isn't there some paragraph to some regulation?" The little girl sat in her frame, horribly placid, horribly calm, so prettily under a tree. Her little dog looked so smugly affectionate.

"Some note, some paragraph, to some section?" I said, visualizing pages and pages of brown regulations with varying print—"An exception that makes the rule?" I tried, working myself up. I pulled my gaze

from the picture to look at the governor. He sat, watching me, frowning. He shook his head negatively, slowly.

"How long?" I said, desperately. "How long must I wait?"

"Three years, I'm afraid, and we can't be certain."

"But I can. I know he will be all right. Can't I vouch for him? Can't I be responsible?"

"His parents, you know, can't vouch for him, can't be responsible."

"I know, I know. But that's different, parents don't know."

"Don't forget I'm a parent. And if you were my daughter I would beg you to fall out of love with Johnson. I would beg you to write to him, not lovingly, but kindly. I would tell you to be brutal with yourself; for you are being unkind to Johnson in this way. You are making his sentence intolerable for him. I would almost ask you to write cruelly to him. To make him fall out of love with you. You know, at heart, don't you, that I can do nothing more for him?"

"Yes. But I can't believe it."

"You must. Think about it. It's no use saying write cruelly to him for your own sake, because you won't believe it. But for his, do. I want you to. Will you?"

"I don't know—I'll try—I don't want to. I know I should. I'd tell anyone else to do it, but it's so difficult to tell myself, to make myself."

How could it be kind, I wondered, when he trusted me, wanted me, expected me to wait? How could it be kind to let him down, to disillusion him? To be another person to lose faith in him? Why should his sentence be intolerable when I wrote to him frequently, and he could write back, relieving himself of emotional frus-

trations? It was illogical—yet I knew because of my efforts to convince myself that it was illogical, that I was wrong. I was pierced by a point which pricked and pricked me. "Write, write, write," it insisted. And I held back, until it pricked so hard that I couldn't sleep without feeling it, I couldn't work without being conscious that the moment was imminent when I would have to write, I couldn't talk without knowing that I should be writing, not talking.

"Why haven't you written?" Richard asked in a letter. "Darling, please write," he begged.

I wrote, coolly, saying nothing of love, nothing at all. I tried to convey it—I couldn't help myself, but I never mentioned it.

"Joan, dearest," he replied. "What is the matter? Something is wrong. Is it Tim? Why are you suddenly restrained, inhibited, upset? I feel so helpless; I so want to be with you."

Tim wrote: "I am coming down tomorrow."

"Something," I said, "must happen. I must decide before he comes."

"You look depressed, Joan," Diana said, surprising me as I stood in the office, my work finished, yet unable to move. "Come to a film with me—I've got to review quite a good one this week."

"All right," I said, grateful for the suggestion.

"Where are you two off to?" Hugh asked, seeing us leaving together.

"Joan is coming to a film with me," Diana told him.

"Pity I'm working," Hugh said, "or I'd come too. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Hugh," I said.

"Well, well," said Philip, in the street outside the office. "Are all the female staff off tonight?"

"I'm going with Diana to a film. She's working, I'm playing."

"Enjoy yourselves," said Philip. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Philip," I said.

"Press tickets," said Diana, and we went straight up to the front of the circle, taking the best seats in the whole place. "You're very silent, Joan."

"I know."

We watched the news.

"The big film is next," Diana said. "Have a chocolate."

"No thank you."

An untidy scrawl shook its way on to the screen. "The Manager is asked to request that the owner of car JX6983 should go outside where a police officer is waiting to see it moved."

"That's Richard Johnson's number," I said, absently.

"What?" said Diana.

"Nothing."

A further scrawl followed, wiggling through the projector. "The Manager is requested by the police to state that a convict has escaped from Finston Prison and may be making his way to this town. They issue the following description and photograph. Anyone seeing a man who could possibly answer to this description is asked to communicate with the police at once . . ."

"They always do this," Diana said.

I knew before the description was inserted on a dirty scrap of paper into the projector, before the photograph was flashed, that it would be Richard's description, Richard's photograph.

"It's Richard Johnson!" Diana whispered.

"I know." I couldn't move. I couldn't speak any

more. I was paralyzed. I sat like an empty sack, bereft of strength, of blood, of will, of thought.

The film came on. I was conscious of movement on the screen, of voices from the sound track, but of nothing more. An hour passed. I looked at the clock. 9.30, I saw. I watched the hand move to 9.31, 9.32, 9.33, 9.34.

"I must go," I said, leaving Diana, squeezing along the row, faintly murmuring "excuse me's" as I went.

It was dark outside. I started to run, turning left out of the cinema, passing taxis parked in a line, the drivers chatting in a group by a lamp; I turned left again, up the hill to my digs. I ran, counting the lamp-posts as I went.

"Six lamp-posts to the top," I said, still running.

"Four," I said, walking.

"Two," I said, running again. At the top lamp-post I turned along my street.

"'Evening," said some man. "Can you help me?"

"No," I gasped, panting from fear and running faster, suddenly spurting.

I fumbled with the key, but before I could insert it the door opened. My landlady stood there.

"Someone's just come for you," she said. "A man. I showed him up to your room. He said you were expecting him."

"Yes," I said, "I was."

"You've been hurrying," she said. "Shall I make you some tea?"

"No thank you. Nothing."

I had one foot on the stairs, one arm on the bannisters; I hesitated before going up. Then I started to go up. Before my room there was a half landing; the bathroom was there. I noticed that the bathroom door was

open before I turned to go up the last three steps to my room. My room was opposite the top of the stairs, a matter of four yards. It looked onto the street, almost directly above the front door. The door was almost shut, not quite ; a line of light shone down the side and along the bottom of the frame. I walked trembling, breathing quickly, my heart pounding, to the door : slowly I pushed it open, keeping my eyes to the ground. I saw the floorboards along the side of the wall, a bit of flowery carpet ; I raised my eyes to the picture hanging on the right wall. The door opened inwards, and I noticed that the curtains weren't drawn properly. I looked towards the armchair in the far corner of the room. I stared fascinated at the black boots I saw there, allowing myself to look upwards only very slowly ; first at the muddy turn ups on a pair of flannel trousers, the ends of a shirt hanging out, an open neck, up and up my gaze meandered, until I looked straight into Richard's eyes. With my left hand I pushed the door shut behind me, waiting for it to click.

"Joan," he said, very softly, rising.

"Richard," I said, whispering, rushing towards him, throwing myself straight into his arms which he flung about me, embracing me with the frantic urgency resulting from the release of pent up emotions which had been simmering for weeks, and exploded with unforeseen power, no longer controllable.

Unforeseen, too, was my response. I clung to Richard, I hugged him as if he were the last branch on a cliff overhanging the sea ; as if there was no hope of life beside him, and he held me tightly, his face in my hair, murmuring my name, purring like a contented cat. For a moment I was unaware that there were such things as rooms and buildings, as other people, as furniture,

as food or cars, or telephones. There were only two people in the world, Richard and I, and we were immortal. Immortal and intangible; clouds of colour enveloped us, large arms stroked us, lungswelling air sweetly scented filled our bodies so that we floated, floated up and round in unbelievable bliss, truly alone. Richard, Richard, why had I ever doubted my love? What had I been doing without him? Summers, winters, autumns, springs of years in the past rushed up amazed to wonder at the bliss they had missed. The future eagerly held open gates of laughter. My mind stopped thinking; it knew only things of wonder, delight, beauty and excitement. My body smiled, full of smugness because it was side by side with Richard's body and the world was full of love. Love that was unexplicable because it was so sudden, so unreasoned. Lines of dreams spiralled about us, binding us together, great symphonies plunged through us, purifying our souls, gathering from them great echoing chords of emotion, and great paintings hastened from past centuries to wonder at the glories of the colours which radiated from our hearts. Suns shone; hot suns of Africa and cold suns of Arctic nights; moons shone with marvellous light, stars shot through skies wildly ricocheting from planet to planet; grass of luminous green grew high, stretching up to mountain tops which melted down with the heat of fireflies that swarmed, glowing, filling space with overwhelming heat, until sea and mountain met in an exciting swirl of fluorescent salts, leaping fishes, clinging vines and the deep, throaty roar of thunder. Thunder from all the greatest falls in the world, in the universe which spun madly faster and faster until we could stand it no more and fell exhausted, barely conscious, onto the floor.

Reality came back harshly, ringing its way into our consciousness, insistently ringing and knocking, drumming into our intimacy, calling again and again, again and again, for our attention.

I was drawn from Richard across the room and out onto the landing; drawn to the frightening reality of a doorbell. Mercilessly it had rung its way into our dream of endless joy. Quickly I ran down the stairs.

My landlady came down behind me, in her dressing gown.

"It's all right," I said, "I'll see to it."

She stood at the stop of the stairs, watching. I opened the door. Three men stood outside.

"Yes," I said. "What do you want?"

"Are you by any chance Miss Reid?"

"Yes."

"We're from the police."

"Come in," I said.

Two of the men were in mufti, the third in uniform.

"We're looking for a man called Richard Johnson. An escaped convict. We have reason to believe he may be here."

"He is." I asked them to wait. "I'll go up and fetch him," I said.

"I'll come with you," said one of the men in mufti. He looked at me curiously. "From the paper, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. I've seen you in court."

"It's all right," I said to my landlady. "It's for me," and she retreated, reluctantly, but a bit embarrassed, in her dressing gown.

Richard was standing in the middle of the room.

"Richard," I said, afraid that he might attack the

man. "You'll have to go. Why, why did you come?"

"Darling," he said, holding me to his side, "I couldn't help it. I had to come; I have to go. Dearest, I'm glad I came."

"So am I," I whispered, clinging to him, dazed. "I'll come too," I said, certain that that would be possible. "Everything must be possible now."

"Everything," he whispered gently, leaving me.

"Everything," I murmured, alone, as a car door slammed. "Everything should be possible now," I repeated, clinging to the word, left with nothing else to cling to.

"Richard, Richard," I cried later, before remembering that he couldn't come. "Tim, Tim," I cried. "Help me, please help me."

"What's the matter, dear?" said my landlady at the door.

"Nothing," I said. "I was just dreaming."

"Just gaining experience," I told myself when she had gone.

THE END